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Black Male Persistence Through Stereotypes in College

Taylor Benjamin Hardy Boyd

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

Grand Valley State University

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Masters of Education

College of Education

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## **Abstract**

Stereotypes create threatening environments for Black males on campus causing social, psychological, and academic effects of Black male collegiate success. The theoretical underpinnings of stereotype threat and critical race theory drive this study and explain where stereotypes derive from and how they create threatening environments for stereotyped Black male collegians. In addition, this thesis seeks to break the deficit narrative surrounding Black males in college. In doing so, this study highlights how Black males persist through stereotypes and the threatening environments they create in both academic and social settings in college. The qualitative phenomenological research design captures the lived experiences of Black male collegians and their feelings, actions, and attitudes towards stereotypes and stereotype threats.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Problem Statement**

Black males are often negatively stereotyped in both academic and social settings during college. The threatening environment created by stereotypes affects Black males' academic success and persistence while enrolled at a college or university. C. Steele and Aronson (1995) contend the social psychological processes stereotypes play in creating a threatening environment lead Black males to lower rates of academic success, performance, and achievement while enrolled in college. Harper (2006a, 2006b) states Black males are consistently overlooked, undermined, and stereotyped by the predominantly White majority as uneducated, lazy, and violent. Black male students face a number of barriers fueled by racial stereotypes such as these and other marginalizing factors that contribute to their social, psychological, and academic development in college. As a result, Black males face challenges pertaining to campus racial climates, self-esteem, sense of belonging, co-curricular involvement and engagement, academic achievement, faculty/staff relationships, and persistence (Harper, 2015; C. Steele, 2010; C. Steele & Aronson, 1995; Tinto, 1987). In turn, the impacted social, psychological, and institutional factors create disparities in rates of retention, graduation, persistence, and overall success of Black males in college (Berryhill & Bee, 2007; Harper, 2006a; C. Steele, 1999; C. Steele, 2010; C. Steele & Aronson, 1995).

### **Importance of the Problem and Rationale for the Study**

The ingrained racial ideology present in the U.S. society is embedded in the social, cultural, psychological, and institutional structures in which it governs. Specifically, media outlets, movies, books, and the overwhelming majority of academic research published regarding Black males are primarily depicted from a deficit perspective (Forham & Ogbu, 1986; Harper,



2012, 2015). That is, research and dialogue focused on Black males is more often tailored towards their shortcomings and mishaps rather than their abilities, successes, and positive attributes (Harper, 2012). This in turn depicts a negative image of Black males in America while continuously reinforcing negative stereotypes and portrayals of Black male intelligence and competence. From an educational perspective, statistics surrounding Black males often highlight trends of disengagement, lack of access and enrollment, failing graduation rates, and declining rates of retention and persistence (Harper, 2006, 2012). As this deficit narrative spreads, it has the potential to influence campus cultures, climates, perceptions, and expectations of Black males on college campuses as their capabilities and mere existence come into question (Harper, 2015).

As the existence of Black males on college campuses is continually questioned, these students become subject to racial stereotypes and stigmas surrounding their talents and abilities as scholars. C. Steele and Aronson (1995) refer to the threatening environment driven by negative perceptions and stereotypes as *stereotype threat*. C. Steele (1999) defines *stereotype threat* as the, “threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (p. 4). As a result, Black males often battle internal and external pressures related to their academic ability and performance in college as a result of racialized stereotypes. Thus subjecting Black males to social, psychological, and institutional factors which hinder their true intellectual ability and potential (C. Steele, 2010). Ultimately these threats, or perceived threats, contribute to lower levels of academic performance and student engagement among Black males in college (Museus, 2008; C. Steele, 2010; C. Steele & Aronson, 1995). Tinto (1987) contends the less engaged students are on campus, the less likely they are to persist through graduation. Moreover, the less

engaged students are in co-curricular activities, the less likely they are to have a stronger sense of belonging to the institution (Edman & Brazil 2008). In addition, co-curricular involvement advances students' social capital as they interact with a diverse array of students on campus creating bonds and lasting relationships that contribute to their overall sense of belonging at the institution.

Students' sense of belonging has been shown as a significant indicator of persistence and success among all college students (Edman & Brazil 2008). Harper, Berhanu, Davis III, and McGuire (2015) contend learning is done by individuals within an organizational setting such as a college or university, and that organizational cultures can promote or hinder individual learning. Berryhill and Bee (2007) found that students of color's psychological sense of community—the perception that they belong and are involved with others—was significantly impacted by the campus' racial climate. Moreover, additional institutional factors related to mentoring, finances, campus culture, cultural centers, and underrepresented faculty and staff of color have the potential to contribute to Black male persistence at the collegiate level.

Mentors and influential figures such as faculty and staff members at colleges and universities weight heavily on a student's academic success (Quaye & Harper, 2015). Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) concluded that faculty-student mentoring predicts satisfaction with college for Black students. Specifically, Barker and Avery (2012) and LaVant, Anderson, and Tiggs (1997) have shown the influential power faculty and staff members have on Black male students through leadership and mentorship initiatives. Still, the majority of PWI faculty population mirrors the student population, leaving young Black men on college campuses with a limited number of significant figures to build a relationship with during their academic tenure.

From an institutional perspective there are a multitude of factors which can contribute to students' retention and persistence (Tinto, 1987). In the wake of interest convergence, colleges and universities should be weary of how poorly it reflects upon the institution when students are unable to persist and rates of attrition continually increase for specific student populations (i.e., Black males). Additionally, the lack of persistence and heightened rates of attrition among college students has the potential to substantially impact state and federal funding (Schneider, 2010; Tinto, 1987). Schneider (2010) found that between 2003 and 2008, \$6.18 billion in subsidies were paid to institutions to fund the education of students who left schooling after the first academic year. Moreover, \$2.9 billion were paid in state and federal grants to students who did not persist past their first year of college (Schneider, 2010).

Nevertheless, the importance of the current problem should not be explored simply through the eyes of interest convergence. Institutions have a duty and responsibility to provide opportunities of improvement and advancement to *all* students. The importance of the problem surrounding Black male collegiate persistence and success is a pertinent issue in the field of higher education. Du Bois (1935) contends that Black students on college campuses are not educated but simply tolerated by systems of higher education. It is not simply the obligation of the institution to tolerate Black male student populations while advancing others. Each student at the institution has a purpose, and should thus persist to and through graduation with the assistance of the institution and its supporting staff. Ignoring issues surrounding Black males on college campuses is not only detrimental to Black male student populations, but to the institution, their peers, those who have influenced Black males, and those who Black males will continue to shape in the future.

## Background of the Problem

Race is a socially constructed ideology based on external characteristics and geographic origins upon which the U.S. society was founded (Williams, Lavizzo-Mourey, & Warren, 1994). Although the United States has made substantial strides in race relations over the past 400 years, CRT explains the *normalcy of racism*, or the seemingly normal science of racism engrained in our everyday interactions and life experiences (Ladson-Billings 1998). African Americans, and for the purpose of this study African American males, experience racial discrimination on a daily basis more so than any other racial group (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Utsey, 1998). Moreover, Black male collegians such as W. E. B. Du Bois have proclaimed instances of injustice in education dating back to the early 1900s. A wealth of literature shows how and why Black males are the most stereotyped individuals in U.S. society (e.g., see Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Fries-Britt, 1997; Harper, 2015; Harper & Nichols, 2008; C. Steele, 2010). As a result, the environments surrounding colleges and universities mirror this societal trend (Harper, 2015; C. Steele, 1995, 2010). Specifically, African American undergraduate college students perceive and experience more racism than their non-African American counterparts (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Hurtado, 1992).

Continued experiences of racism have the potential to affect Black males both physically and mentally. The stress associated with continued experiences of racism is described by Utsey (1998) as *race-related stress*. Utsey contends that race-related stress can be observed or directly experienced at the individual, cultural, and institutional level by African American college students. For many African Americans, experiencing racism and race-related stress can have severe implications to their overall health and well-being. Health factors associated with race and racism include, but are not limited to, high blood pressure, psychiatric disorders, and low self-

esteem (Broman, 1997; Utsey, 1998; Williams & Collins, 1995). Moreover, the stress associated with race and racist attitudes, or racism-related stress, has been linked to negative self-esteem, depression, and anxiety (Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010).

The stress associated with racism is a continuing problem on college campuses and can have significant influence on the ways in which Black males perform both academically and socially at the collegiate level (Broman, 1997; Griffin et al., 2010; C. Steele & Aronson, 1995; Utsey, 1998). Specifically, the influence of racism-related stress has been shown to negatively affect Black students' academic motivation in coursework, homework, and class attendance and participation (Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010). These factors weight heavily on Black males overall academic coursework and performance, ultimately creating a reality of classroom underperformance and declining rates of persistence and graduation. Harper, Berhanu, Davis, and McGuire (2015) state that Black males have the lowest four and six-year graduation completion rates among all sexes and racial identity groups. For example, in 2004, the six year graduation rate for Black males was 44.3%, while White men graduated at a rate of 61.4% and Black women graduated at a rate of 53.2% (Harper, 2006). While there are various factors for alleviating these inequalities, the effects of stereotypes and the threatening environments in which they create warrant further investigation in the field of higher education.

When addressing stereotypes and the threatening environments that ensue, Walton and Cohen (2003) contend when the outgroup's ability is challenged or questioned, the stereotyped group performs better academically. Additional research has shown that dispelling impugned stereotypes against a certain group of individuals (i.e., Black males) has increased enjoyment in the academic process, academic engagement, and grade point averages (GPAs; Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002). In an effort to alleviate some of the disparities between Black males and other

college students, student affairs administrators have implemented specialized enrollment programs, mentorship programs, multicultural spaces and offices on campus; however, declining graduation and persistence rates still exist for Black males on college campuses (Quaye & Harper, 2015).

### **Statement of Purpose**

This study is intentional in pinpointing one of the many problems Black males face in college—stereotypes. The purpose of this study was to examine how Black males persist through college despite facing stereotypes and the threatening environments in which they create on a daily basis. Further, this study sought to explore the academic, social, and psychological influences stereotypes have on Black male achievement in college. In addition, this study sought to extract ways in which Black males persist through the threatening environments created by stereotypes, while identifying strategies which may prove effective when responding to or dealing with racial situations/stereotypes. In doing so, results of this study might inform administrators, faculty/staff, and future Black male collegians on how some Black males are persisting through barriers such as stereotypes while enrolled at a college or university.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that will guide this study are:

- (1) What stereotypes do Black males experience in college?
- (2) What affects do stereotypes have on Black male achievement in college?
- (3) In what ways, if any, are Black males persisting through stereotypes in college?

### **Research Design**

A qualitative phenomenological research approach was used for the purposes of gathering and collecting data regarding Black males' experiences with racial stereotypes and the

affects they have on students' success in college. The phenomenological nature of this study provided participants with the opportunity to describe their lived experiences from a first-hand point of view. Initially, each participant conducted a one-on-one, semi-structured interview exploring their experiences prior to college as well as current interactions with stereotypes in college. The primary researcher then observed participants in an academic or social setting and recorded stereotype threats and interactions.. Interviews immediately following each observation allowed for a more detailed and accurate account of how Black males persist through stereotype environments in college settings. Additionally, this phenomenological approach gives insight into the realities and experiences Black males face regarding stereotypes and the threatening environments they create on a daily basis. Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to explain how their lived experiences have helped them persist through the inevitable threatening environment stereotypes create for Black males on college campuses.

### **Participant Population**

Participants were current undergraduate college students studying at a large, four-year public institution in the Midwestern region of the United States. The number of participants for this study was six (6) individuals who meet the qualification criteria outlined in this section. Interviewing this number of participants gave me the opportunity to gather and obtain in-depth accounts and experiences from Black males at varying levels of academic standing. Participants were selected through criterion based sampling procedures. Participants self-identified with the following criteria: 1) Black/African American, 2) male, 3) have a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher and 4) have been enrolled at the institution for at least one academic year. The GPA criterion ensures each participating Black male is showing signs of academic persistence as they are meeting or exceeding the threshold for graduating with a degree from the accredited

institution in which the study was conducted. Additionally, the one-year enrollment requirement ensured students have shown some level of persistence through stereotypes and the threatening environments they create within the collegiate realm.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were collected through audio-recorded, semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews. Black male participants were recruited through a non-random sampling email, Black campus groups and organizations, and through the help of administrators and faculty members who identified potential candidates. Snowball sampling, or a non-probability sampling technique utilizing existing participants as recruiters for future subjects consisting of friends and acquaintances, was also utilized when selecting participants for this study (Merriam, 2009). Each individual was briefed on their rights as a participant as well as provided with any confidentiality clauses and rights to request the audio-recording of the interview. The semi-structured interviews followed trends and occurrences identified in the literature review. Interviews were transcribed for the purposes of creating and extracting codes, themes, and concepts through thematic synthesis of the content identified in the recordings. After transcription and analysis, all audio-recordings were destroyed.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Attrition:* The withdrawal, dropping out, suspension, or expulsion of a student or students from a college or university (Tinto, 1982).

*Campus Climate:* Current attitudes, behaviors, and principles set forth by student, faculty, staff members regarding the atmosphere of the general campus environment impacting the success and retention of all students and employees (Berryhill & Bee, 2007).



Critical Race Theory (CRT): A theoretical framework used to “analyze the role of race and racism in perpetuating social disparities between dominant and marginalized racial groups” (Hiraldo, 2010, p. 54)

Cultural Dissonance: “Conflict between one’s own sense of culture and what other expect” (Torres, 2003, p. 540)

Institutional Factors: Policies, strategies, methodologies, and practices controlled by the institution and its stakeholders either positively or negatively impacting the students’ experience in the collegiate setting (Harper, 2012).

Microaggression: “Are subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 61).

Persistence: A student’s ability to continue in their academic, social, and institutional endeavors despite barriers, opposition, or difficulty regarding the task at hand (Tinto, 1982).

Psychological Factors: “The important issues people face as their lives progress, such as how to define themselves, their relationship with others, and what to do with their lives” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 42).

Retention: “Continuous enrollment leading to the acquisition of a degree, diploma, certificate or transfer” (Hagedorn, 2015).

Social Factors: “Experiences largely external to students that have fundamental influence on their experiences” (Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones, & Allen, 2010, p. 237).

Stereotype threat: “The threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (C. Steele, 1999, p. 3).

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The study was delimited in several ways. First, the study includes a GPA minimum (2.0) for selected participants. Second, this study focuses on Black males currently enrolled at a college or university, specifically, a predominately White institution (PWI). Additionally, it should be noted the race and sex specificity used within this study limits the data and excludes all other students of color including same race peers such as Black females. Third, the participants must present some level of involvement through a campus activity, student organization, or other university based or affiliated entity. Finally, choosing to neglect first year Black male students was strategic and intentional. In this, first year students were not seen fit to provide meaningful experience related to student persistence through stereotypes in college due to their lack of experience in the collegiate realm. Thus, they have not had enough time to navigate institutional settings, experiences, or interactions to meaningfully contribute to a study rooted in persistence.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The experiences participants have at this PWI in the Midwest, might not be the same for other Black males at different PWIs. Some data is self-reported (i.e., campus involvement) and is subject to inconsistencies and variations. Additionally, asking students to reflect upon previous experiences related to stereotypes in high school and home life may prove difficult for some participants to remember accurately.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The introduction provides a detailed description of the problem that guides the study. In the second chapter, an in depth review of relevant literature highlights the theoretical frameworks of stereotype threat and critical race theory as the guiding theoretical frameworks of this study.

Chapter three discusses the design of the study, outlining the participants of the study, data collection, and data analysis techniques and methodology. Finally, chapter four provides a thorough examination of the results which lead to the concluding arguments, discussions, and recommendations for future initiatives in chapter five.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

This literature review provides a theoretical framework for examining the psychological, social, and institutional factors influencing Black male persistence and stereotypes in college. First, critical race theory (CRT) is explained in five major tenets. This theoretical framework examines the overarching theme from which the systemic nature of oppression influences and perpetuates stereotypes and racism towards Black males. From an educational perspective, CRT highlights why and how Black males are continually underrepresented in areas such as student engagement, academic achievement, and persistence in colleges and universities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Following CRT, the theoretical penning's of *stereotype threat* is introduced. *Stereotype threat*, or the threatening environment created by blatant or perceived stereotypes against certain identity groups, is the guiding theory driving this study (C. Steele, 1995). Student persistence in college is also explored and narrowly focused to highlight the trends and occurrences of Black males in the collegiate realm. Literature introduced uses the guiding theoretical frameworks to examine three categories: (1) psychological, (2) social, and (3) institutional issues/factors pertaining to Black males persistence in college. Psychological factors examined include sense of community/belonging and the correlations between stress and race. Social factors examined include social pressures, cues, and expectations continually reinforced by families, peers, and society. Lastly, institutional factors examined focus on the influence of faculty/staff relationships, mentoring, and campus climate/culture.

## Theoretical Framework

### Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) derived in the mid-1970s after realizations that the Civil Rights Movement had become somewhat stagnant. The first underpinnings of CRT arose from outgrowth of an earlier legal movement called Critical Legal Studies (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Similar to the Civil Rights Movement, CRT is rooted in issues pertaining to history, economics, group- and self-interest, feelings, and the unconscious (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). It is a combination of thoughts and ideas by scholars across the world who devoted their time and efforts to enlightening others on societal issues pertaining to race, racism, and power (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Furthermore, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) viewed CRT from an educational lens to highlight the inequalities marginalized groups face in association with their dominant peers. The five tenets of CRT are the *normalcy of racism*, *interest convergence*, *counter-storytelling*, *intersectionality and anti-essentialism*, and *whiteness as property* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

**Normalcy of racism.** First, CRT notes that racism is normal, and addresses ways in which society operates on a daily manner in regards to the common and everyday experiences of people of color, suggesting racism is seemingly a “normal science” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 7). U.S. societal constructs exist in part because of its foundation in racially based discrimination and slavery, which is reinforced through racial bigotry and systemic oppression. In this, CRT examines the structure of power based on White privilege and White supremacy. White privilege is described as the societal privileges White peoples both consciously and unconsciously benefit from every day. Accordingly, White supremacy is the belief that White peoples and the White race is superior to all other races in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Delgado and Stefancic go on to state racism is not a random or isolated incident of individuals behaving badly; rather racism is an ingrained and seemingly normal part of our everyday lives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

**Interest convergence.** Interest convergence is a tenet within CRT explaining the motivational factors compelling advocacy for minoritized groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Quaye & Harper, 2015). Minoritized is utilized rather than minority, to refer to underrepresented groups and their ongoing experiences with marginalization (Chase, Dowd, Pazich, & Bensimon, 2012). Minoritized individuals are not actual minorities, rather they are minoritized in the dominant context of White supremacy asserted in the U.S. society (Chase, Dowd, Pazich, & Bensimon, 2012). This framework insists Whites will not actively pursue or advance people of color “out of the goodness of their hearts” (Quaye & Harper, 2015, p. 63). CRT theorists contend Whites must have something in it for them (e.g., extrinsic rewards) rather than providing services to minoritized groups as a result of intrinsic motivation. Subsequently, large institutional changes pertaining to Black males such as the presence of same race faculty/staff of color on campus, culturally safe spaces, or institutional policy changes are often reactive and occur after uprisings, protest, or media attention has jeopardized the institution’s reputation, prestige or financial gains.

**Counterstorytelling.** Storytelling can be seen as one of the oldest forms of expression and human art (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Ladson-Billings (1998) suggests stories and counter narratives add necessary contextual contours to objective perspectives. Additionally, Ladson-Billings (1998) states that naming one’s own reality, or telling one’s story, seeks to highlight the importance or significance of the perspective or point of view of the storyteller. Further, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) suggest written stories and narratives call attention to neglected evidence, creating a process of correction in our system of beliefs and categories by reminding others of

our common humanity. In a higher educational context counterstorytelling through assessments, focus groups, and individual interviews could shed light on how to effectively engage and advance Black male student success.

**Intersectionality and anti-essentialism.** In the context of CRT, scholars began to see race as a product of various social forces. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) define *intersectionality* as “the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combinations play out in various settings” (p. 51). Thus, the complexities surrounding multiple identities construct individual and group experiences.

Coupled with intersectionality is *essentialism*. Essentialism is the notion that all people identifying within the same group, think, act, and believe in the same way about the same things (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), “CRT scholars guard against essentializing the perspectives and experiences of racial groups” (p. 59), and contend the amount of within-group differences is greater amongst ethnic or racial groups than between group differences (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This form of generalization has been shown to cause significant psychological affects pertaining to sense of belonging, stereotype threat, and other factors related to lower levels of academic achievement (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

**Whiteness as property.** Harris (1993) notes, “The ability to define, possess, and own property has been a central feature of power in America” (p. 53). Harris (1993) argues that being White has a material and social value and introduces four property functions of whiteness: (1) rights of disposition; (2) rights to use and enjoyment; (3) reputation and status property; and (4) the absolute right to exclude. The property of being White is linked to inherent privileges Blacks are aware of and will never possess.

## **Stereotype Threat**

C. Steele (1997) defines *stereotype threat* as when a negative stereotype becomes self-relevant “for something one is doing, for an experience one is having, or for a situation one is in, that has relevance to one’s self-definition” (p. 616). For stereotype threat to exist, the individual in which the stereotype is imposed upon must identify with the domain being evaluated (C. Steele & Aronson, 1995). Therefore the stereotyped individual must identify in some way with the identity being challenged for stereotype threat to exist (C. Steele, 2010). Further, C. Steele (2010) contends the threatening environment negative stereotypes create are generated from the “pressure not to confirm the stereotype for fear of being judged or treated in terms of it” (p. 89). Stereotype threat is a situational threat that can affect any group of individuals for which stereotypes exist (C. Steele, 1997).

Stereotype threats have been shown to affect standardized test performances of African Americans at prestigious private institutions such as Stanford (C. Steele & Aronson, 1995), and large public institutions such as the University of Michigan (Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn, & C. Steele, 2001). Although stereotype threat has been shown to affect various racial groups of peoples (e.g., see Aronson et al., 1999; Muzzattie & Agnoli, 2007; Stone et al., 1995), those most affected by stereotype threats are Black/African American students (C. Steele, 2010). Regarding education, stereotype threat has the potential to cause significant academic underperformance of different identity groups in a variety of circumstances. For instance, women in science and engineering, racial/ethnic standardized test performance, White men, and K-12 students in Italy have all shown signs of academic underperformance as a result of stereotype threats (Aronson et al., 1999; Benbow & Stanley, 1983; Muzzatti & Agnoli, 2007; C. Steele, 1995; Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, Darley, 1999). Specifically, Black men in college are more prone to experiencing



stereotypes in general and are thus more susceptible to stereotype threats and the threatening environments that stereotypes create (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Fries-Britt, 1997; C. Steele, 1995, 2010).

The repercussions of experiencing stereotype threats have resulted in significant negative academic, social, physical, and psychological effects. Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, and Woods (2009) found that psychological factors such as students' sense of belonging can have significant implications on student attrition and persistence rates. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) identified internal social and cultural barriers for Black men, and stated that internal racism and fear of confirming the stereotype of "acting white" (p. 177) led some Black men to lower levels of academic achievement in school. In addition, health risk factors pertaining to stress, anxiety, hypertension, and high blood pressure have all been linked to stereotypes and stereotype threats (Browman, 1997; C. Steele, 1995; Utsey, 1998). Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn, and C. Steele (2001) found that in the wake of stereotypes African Americans encountered elevated blood pressure levels over the course of a 20-minute period. These negative effects caused by stereotype threats have been identified as direct and/or indirect contributor to students' academic and social success in college (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Browman, 1997; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Utsey, 1998).

Further investigation into stereotype threats has shown they can be reduced or diminished by simply increasing numbers of diverse peoples in group settings (C. Steele, 2010). As individuals with minoritized identities further populate the environment or setting, the threatening environment created by stereotypes diminishes (C. Steele, 2010). Those who were previously threatened are now more likely to engage in discourse and dialogue in the classroom.

However, identifying stereotype threats can prove difficult at times. Still, CRT suggests

counterstorytelling has the ability to extract meaningful details of a story or experience through the art of storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As an example, Harper (2009) utilized the art of storytelling to understand and describe the lived experiences of Black males who had experienced stereotypes in college. Subsequently, qualitative research focused on how Black male collegians and their experiences with stereotypes could shed light on the lived experiences of this unique student population (Harper, 2009). Further, key findings could have the potential to reduce stereotypes, stereotype threats, and the ways in which Black male collegians are viewed in college likely paving the way for future Black male collegians. As this pathway is created, a key contributor of advancing, supporting, and guiding Black male collegians is to reshape the view in which we see these intellectually gifted individuals.

### **Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework**

Harper's (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework is one of few groundbreaking models aimed at reshaping the view of Black males in higher education. This framework derives from 30 years of literature focused on Black males in education and society, and is grounded in sociology, psychology, gender studies, and educational theories. Harper (2007) contends some of the guiding research used to inform this framework focused on "understanding why black men excel instead of adding to the already well-understood reasons that they fail" (p. 61).

The framework consist of a series of probing questions researchers, educators, and administrators can direct at Black males about their experiences to and through college. Questions are broken into three categories: (1) Pre-College Socialization and Readiness, (2) College Achievement, and (3) Post-College Success (Harper, 2012). Further, these three overarching sections are subcategorized into what Harper (2012) calls "eight researchable dimensions of achievement (familial factors, K-12 school forces, out-of-school college prep

resources, classroom experiences, out-of-class engagement, enriching educational experiences, graduate school enrollment, and career readiness)” (p. 5). Each of these subcategories or dimensions, possesses anywhere from two to four engaging questions about Black males’ experiences in regards to education, influential factors, and future endeavors (Harper, 2012). The research literature that follows ties each of the theoretical frameworks examined above to pertinent issues pertaining to Black males and matters of engagement, psychological, social, and physical factors as they relate to stereotypes.

### **Research Literature**

Higher education literature has produced a minimal amount of research focused on the experiences Black males have with stereotypes in college. The forthcoming provides a synthesized version of the psychological, social, and institutional factors related to stereotypes, the threatening environments they create, and the effect stereotypes and stereotype threats have on the academic performance of Black male collegians.

#### **Black Male Persistence in College**

The longstanding issue of student persistence consist of countless variations of identifiers that may or may not contribute to or hinder a student’s ability to graduate college. For instance, Astin’s (1984) theory of Involvement highlights the significance co-curricular engagement plays in student success while Tinto’s (1993) relates student persistence to separation, transition, and incorporation into the new collegiate environment.

Astin (1984) describes involvement in more a behavioral meaning stating, “It is not so much what the individual thinks or feels but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement (p. 298). Astin goes on to conclude that influential variables pertaining to persistence and attrition seemingly stem from student involvement and/or

non-involvement. The five postulates comprising Astin's theory are as follows: (1) involvement stems from physical and psychological investments of energy; (2) the energy exerted in activities occurs on a continuum and can vary according to time, activity, and student; (3) involvement incorporates quantitative and qualitative components; (4) learning and development is proportional to quality and quantity of effort placed in involvement; and, (5) educational practices must be intentional about increasing levels of involvement.

Similar to Astin (1984), Tinto (1975, 1982, 1993) places precedent on the relationship between co-curricular involvement and student persistence. As previously noted, Tinto (1993) suggests students must separate, transition, and incorporate into the collegiate realm if they are to be successful in persisting through college. Separation consists of students' ability to distance themselves from their previous lives (family, friends, school, etc.) and seemingly embark on new beginnings (Tinto, 1993). The transition stage occurs when students have successfully disassociated themselves from their patterns and behaviors of their past, but have not yet fully immersed themselves into their newly found selves within college life (Tinto, 1993). Lastly, incorporation takes place when students have adapted to and adopted the cultural customs, patterns, and norms of behavior exhibited by the greater collegiate community (Tinto, 1993). The ideas, patterns of behavior, and overall campus culture and climate play a large role in the advancement of each of the above stages in which Tinto (1993) describes.

While Tinto's (1993) work is compelling, a revisited and more recent account of his work countered the original claims (Tinto, 2006). In this, Tinto (2006) contends for underrepresented student populations (primarily comprised of students of color), remaining connected to past communities, church, tribes, or family was an essential part of their persistence through college.

Additionally, Harper (2006b) reiterates that for Black males, familial and community support are an essential part of Black male persistence to and through the collegiate realm.

Although these theories provide insight to how and why students persist, gaps remain in the rates of persistence among students of color, specifically Black males. Numerous studies have recognized the gaps in persistence between Black males and their White male counterparts (e.g., see Astin, 1984; Berryhill & Bee, 2007; Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2006a; 2006b, 2012, 2015; Ross et al., 2012; Schneider, 2010; C. Steele & Aronson, 1995). Comparatively speaking, Black males graduate college at alarmingly lower rates than all other racial and ethnic minoritized groups (Harper, 2012). In 2004, the mean graduation rate for Black males was 44.3%, while White males graduated at a rate of 61.4% and Black females graduated at a rate of 53.2% (Harper, 2006). This disparity is not only represented at the undergraduate level but at the graduate and professional degree level as well. In 2003 White males earned 75.5% of degrees awarded at the professional level while Black males accounted for 5.2% of degrees awarded at the professional level (Harper, 2006a).

In an effort to combat these staggering statistics, student affairs professionals have developed specialized programs, orientations, and campus/community groups/organizations to adhere to the misrepresentation of Black male persistence rates in college. It has been shown Black male leadership programs (BMLPs) help students get involved in campus organizations, increase faculty engagement, and build community among participants (Sutton & Terrell, 1997). Multicultural centers, Black student unions, and Black cultural centers provide students with a comforting space on campus where they are able to express their opinions and views without being viewed, judged, or stereotyped for doing so (Baker & Avery, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Sutton & Terrell, 1997). Initiatives such as these have been shown to improve Black male

persistence rates as they continue to increase students' sense of belonging, peer support, out-of-class faculty engagement, and co-curricular involvement (Barker & Avery, 2012; Broman, 1997; Harper, 2006b; 2012; LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997). The psychological, social, and institutional factors associated with influential indicators of Black male persistence have been shown to positively or negatively affect Black male experiences in higher education (Berryhill & Bee, 2007; Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). The forthcoming introduces and discusses the psychological, social, and institutional factors impacting Black male persistence at colleges and universities.

### **Psychological Factors**

**Internalization of racism.** As the inevitable nature of stereotype threats continue to persist for Black male collegians, little attention addresses how students are dealing with these racial situations. There are a number of approaches to handling or dealing with stereotype environments, however one holds significant psychological implications.

During stereotype threat situations, Black males may experience an array of emotions and feelings which could include shock, confusion, surprise, anxiousness, anger, vulnerability, or fear. As a result, Black males' may feel the need to internalize feelings and emotions stemming from stereotype threats to seemingly ignore the situation at hand. This internalization may stem from instances of racial battle fatigue as students simply become "fed up" with policing others racial ignorance (McGee & Martin, 2011). Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) state these coping strategies of internalization and coping strategies can lead to severe and traumatic psychological stressors. Internalization has been linked to psychological affects including feelings of vulnerability and loneliness fostering lower levels of self-esteem affecting mental health (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). However, Harper's (2015) work surrounding resistant responses to

stereotypes suggest students refused to ignore microaggressions and racial slurs by directly addressing the stereotype when it arose. Moreover, these individuals rejected the idea of suppressing or internalizing feelings and emotions in the wake of microaggressions and stereotypes (Harper, 2015).

Although ignoring stereotypes is a method employed by some, literature surrounding this topic suggest Black males suppress stereotypes and stereotype threats by directly addressing racial stereotypes and microaggressions (Harper, 2015). In this, Black males are able to negate the internalization of feelings and emotions, which is seen as one of the root causes of psychological factors associated with stereotypes and stereotype threats.

**Sense of community/belonging.** When students become ingrained into the university community on a social and psychological level, their rates of persistence and retention increase significantly (Hausmann et al., 2009). Hausmann et al. (2009) refers to this ingrained institutional awareness as a student's sense of community/belonging. Variables such as sense of belonging and sense of community can significantly affect a student's academic ability, and if based in racial stereotypes, psychological implications for students of color may arise (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Berryhill & Bee, 2007).

Many of the detrimental psychological affects influencing students of color root themselves in stereotypes and encompass issues such as isolation, not fitting in, and sense of community/belonging (Berryhill & Bee, 2007; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). Racial discrimination against Black/African American people has been shown to cause lower levels of life satisfaction for those targeted by discriminatory acts (Broman, 1997). This can affect Black males psychological sense of community (PSOC) or—"the perception among students that they belong in a setting and are involved harmoniously with others there" (Berryhill & Bee, 2007, p.

76). PSOC proved as a significant contributor to overall academic success and influenced both academic motivation and perceptions and reactions of students of color on college campuses (Berryhill & Bee, 2007).

Previous studies suggest when Black students are the racially minoritized, their racial identity becomes salient to not only themselves but to others around them. This saliency seemingly results in a lack of sense of belonging for Black students ( Berryhill & Bee, 2007; Hausmann et al., 2009; Johnson et al. 2007; Sedlacek, 1987; Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging has also been identified as having a direct effect on institutional commitment and persistence among African American students (Edman & Brazil, 2008; Hausmann et al., 2009). Moreover, isolation is significantly correlated with sense of belonging and can cause students to break routine and interrupt study habits and academic intrigue (Hausmann et al., 2009).

Specifically, Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) examined the psychological and psychosocial influence racial microaggressions and stereotypes play in Black male students' sense of belonging at the institutional level. Smith, Allen, and Danley found in many instances when Black males were stereotyped on campus they had feelings of confusion, resentment, anxiety, avoidance, and fear. The additional emotions Black males feel as a result of stereotypes and racial microaggressions impact their ability to not only perform academically, but socially as well (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007).

**Stress and race.** As stress builds it has the ability to increase tension, pressure, blood levels, and anxiety in human beings (Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010). Stress and stress-related incidents have been seen to not only affect individuals physically, but psychologically as well (Pieterse & Carter, 2007).



It has been well documented within the United States that Blacks are far more susceptible to racism and racial interactions than other ethnic and racial groups (Pieterse & Carter, 2007). Harrell (2000) investigated bridging the gap between racism and stress, and proposed the idea of race-related stress or “the race-related transactions between individuals or groups and their environment that emerge from the dynamics of racism, and that are perceived to tax or exceed existing individual and collective resources or threaten well-being” (Harrell, 2000, p. 44). Specifically, Pieterse and Carter (2007) found that among Blacks, men are more heavily impacted psychologically than women in regards to their experiences with racism-related stress. As racism related-stress takes effect, students begin to become more disengaged with classes, view the institution negatively, and are less social (Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010). According to Tinto (1993) each of these are key indicators of college student persistence and attrition rates.

### **Social Factors**

Social experiences and skills developed in college play a significant role in a student’s overall collegiate experience. Researchers have examined the relationship between co-curricular engagement/involvement and social experiences with peers and academic achievement a number of times (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993; Harper, 2006b, 2012). Still, the experiences of Black males in college continuously show lower levels of social and co-curricular engagement (Harper, 2006a). Scholars have examined this phenomenon and have identified key contributors to Black male social engagement includes, but is not limited to, peer support, mentoring, faculty interaction, and campus climate (Harper, 2006b; Barker & Avery, 2012; Hausmann et al., 2009).

In 2002, Black males in college made up 4.3% of the total student population (Harper, 2006a). This causes students to experience instances of tokenism, racism, and isolation and thus

perceive a low critical mass in group settings (C. Steele, 2010). C. Steele (2010) describes *critical mass* as when an individual feels more comfortable interacting in a group setting as a result of an increase of representation of others who identify with their same marginalized identity. That is, when entering a room, Black male students may feel a heightened sense of comfort and belonging, and are thus more likely to engage with the group if others who share similar identities are present (Purdie-Vaughns, C. Steele, Davies, Dittmann, & Crosby, 2008). On one hand, there is no longer a threat as a result of the marginalized identity at hand because the identity group/groups are present enough to diminish the threatening environment created by the stereotype (C. Steele, 2010). On the other hand, if feelings of isolation and tokenism exist, Black students are less likely to engage in discussion or social experiences with others (C. Steele, 2010).

The “mistrust of the motives behind other people’s treatment” (Walton & Cohen, 2007, p. 83) may also arise after experiencing stereotypes or threatening environments. Moreover, Walton and Cohen (2007) and Zirkel (2004) and found that in schooling, social isolation correlated with lower levels of academic interest more so for students of color than with the White student majority. Additionally, the media, friends, and family members constantly remind Black males of their inability to advance academically (Harper, 2006a, 2012). With this, a variety of unwritten codes, rules, and expectations, representing powerful guiding principles among in-group dynamics emerges as well (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Harper, 2006b). However, when Black males reject the stereotypes put forth against them and begin to excel academically, other in-group issues may arise. For example, some Black males hide their intellectual abilities in order to fit-in with their cultural peer groups (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This can be interpreted as *code-switching* or using coded messages or speech in order to conceal a secret, often times in

plain site (Molinsky, 2007). Eastman (1992) explores *cultural code-switching*, and suggests the psychological tolls and implications associated with *cultural code-switching* are stringent in nature and subject individuals to hidden agendas, loss of identity, and lack of self-efficacy (Eastman, 1992; Molinsky, 2007).

Although Black males in college face a number of barriers influenced or triggered by both in-group and out-group stereotypes, Harper (2006b) found that peer support was a significant indicator of success among Black male college students. Respondents reported their peers as providing them with leverage and support in times of need, advancement, and achievement in their collegiate endeavors (Harper, 2006b). Further, faculty, staff members, administrators, and university departments/centers have been shown to negate some of the burdens stereotypes play in the advancement and achievement of Black males in college (Barker & Avery, 2012; Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Institutional factors and the ways in which they support, enrich, and advance Black male collegiate success is discussed in detail in the following section.

### **Institutional Factors**

Harper (2012) defines institutional factors as policies, strategies, methodologies, and practices controlled by the institution and its stakeholders either positively or negatively influencing the students' experience in the collegiate setting. Institutional factors also encompass interactions with other individuals on campus including faculty members, administrators, and peers and colleagues. At all levels of education, Black males lack representation throughout the administrative and academic sectors (Harper, 2006a). Specifically, in 2014 colleges and universities Black male administrators made up 5.2% of the total population of full-time employees excluding full-time/part-time faculty (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). As

demonstrated in the coming sections, the literature examines how intuitional factors such as interactions with others can influence, affect, and ultimately shape Black male students' experiences and academic achievement in college.

**Faculty/staff.** Although student of colors' enrollment rates have shown progress within the past decade, there is still an overwhelming disparity in the racial makeup of collegiate professors in the U.S. system of higher education. In 2013, roughly 5.5% of full-time faculty members identified as Black (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). Further, Black males consisted of 2.4% of faculty members in degree granting public institutions (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). As students of color increase, it is imperative that the racial makeup of faculty and staff reflect that of the general student body. For instance, Hagedorn et al. (2007) found that diversifying faculty contributed to the success of not only students of color, but to the general student body as well. Additionally, increasing diversity among faculty and staff members not only contributes heavily to marginalized student populations, but also increases intercultural competence, global citizenship, and awareness of others for all engaged parties (Hagedorn et al., 2007).

Diversifying faculty proved as a significant indicator in the recruitment and academic achievements of students of color (antonio, 2000). As students begin their academic careers, they seek out faculty and staff members who resemble themselves. Students are more likely to approach, interact, and engage with a faculty or staff members who hold similar, or the same identities as they do (Hagedorn et al., 2007; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Increasing Black faculty on an institutional level could impact classroom interactions between Black men and their professors. Harper (2006a) contends negative racial interactions and experiences inside the classroom harmfully affected Black male students' educational outcomes when interacting with

predominately White faculty. Thus, if faculty representation increases, faculty, staff, and students will likely have increased opportunities to create mentoring relationships which ultimately contribute to the persistence and retention of Black males on college campuses (Harper, 2006a; LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997).

**Mentoring.** Shandley (1989) describes mentoring as an intentional, nurturing, and supportive process between protégé and teacher where guidance, wisdom, and knowledge are exchanged between the two parties. Mentoring has been identified as one of the most important contributors of student success in college (Tinto, 1993). Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) conducted a study on the experiences of Black college students by using existing data from the 4th edition of the *College Student Experiences Questionnaire* (CSEQ). The sample consisted of 554 Black college students, and concluded that faculty-student mentoring was a predictor of overall student satisfaction in college for Black collegians (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). In addition, establishing a research-focused relationship was more positively associated satisfaction than a personal mentoring relationship (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Strayhorn and Terrell's study brings to light the significance that relationship building and mentoring have on the academic success of Black college students.

Although Strayhorn and Terrell's (2007) study concluded the relationship be research focused, Jaasma and Koper's (1999) study found that increased faculty interaction in general made undergraduates more comfortable and more likely to approach and engage with a faculty member as a result of increased interactions. For example, results from Harper's (2012) qualitative research on Black male achievers indicated that Black males involvement in clubs and organizations gave them the opportunity to connect with high level faculty and administrators. As a result, Black males viewed these individuals as mentors who they could rely

on for advocacy, advice, letter of recommendation, and ways to navigate institutional settings and initiatives (Harper, 2012).

Overall, it has been made clear that the positive interactions Black students have with faculty and staff members at the collegiate level contribute to increases in persistence and retention efforts for those students (Barker & Avery, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Nevertheless, interactions on college campuses include more than just interactions with faculty and staff members of the institution. Thus, as students continually interact with each other in person, online, in the classroom, and in the hallways, campus climates and campus cultures emerge.

**Campus climate/culture.** Campus climate and campus culture differ in many ways. Campus climate is described in the present or now, while campus culture is more of a longitudinal process that represents a historically collective perception of the campus climates. However for the purposes of this research I saw it fit to provide existing research focused on both topics and their relation to Black males experiences with stereotypes and their persistence through college.

Berryhill and Bee (2007) define campus climate as attitudes, behaviors, and principles set forth by students, faculty, and staff members which impact the success and retention of all university students and employees. For Black males on campus, the majority of the attitudes and behaviors towards them come in the form of stereotypes. For instance, Black males have consistently reported having their academic abilities and talents questioned, negated, or attributed to affirmative action, athletics, or programs/scholarships related to their race or socioeconomic status (McGee & Martin, 2011; Harper, 2012, 2015). In addition to academic abilities, Black males are often disproportionately represented in interactions with police

officers, heavily surveilled, and are seen as “out of place” or “fitting the description” (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). In social settings, Black males reported that their White classmates or peers assumed they knew where to get drugs, how to dance, slang terms or broken English, came from impoverished neighborhoods, were athletically talented, and had a scary or threatening appurtenance (Harper, 2015).

As Black males are continually questioned, negated, and stereotyped on campus the campus climate and culture surrounding Black males is constructed. As a result, Black males experience feelings of confusion, resentment, anxiety, avoidance, and fear (Smith, Allen, & Danley 2007). Further, these feelings and responses to stereotypes such as these have been shown to affect the academic and social performances of Black males in college (Harper, 2015; Harper et al. 2015; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; C. Steele, 2010).

Policies and procedures at the institutional level contribute heavily to the campus climate and culture of an institution as well (Berryhill & Bee, 2007). For instance, policies and procedures such as land/space devoted to Black fraternities and sororities compared to their White counterparts, campus climate survey results and initiatives, implementation of cultural spaces and offices, and the retention and recruitment of faculty and staff members all contribute to the campus climate and culture of an institution. Institutional decision making and policy changes reflect directly on the administration and its members. For many students these initiatives simply serve as a reminder to students of color, specifically Black males, that the institution and its administrators are concerned with students’ well-being, achievement, and advancement through college.

## Summary

The theoretical underpinnings guiding this research derive from Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) CRT, C. Steele's (1999) stereotype threat, and Harper's (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework. CRT explains the socially engrained nature of racism through the normalcy of racism tenet, stereotype threat visualizes the threatening environment stereotypes can create, and the anti-deficit framework provides a positive, optimistic framework for viewing Black males on college campuses.

Astin (1984) and Tinto (1993) emphasize the importance of co-curricular involvement and college student success. Further, Harper et al. (2015) provide highlights, trends, and occurrences related to Black male student engagement on college campuses. Still, as institutional factors continue to reflect societal norms, Black males will inevitably face race-based discrimination in the forms of stereotypes in college. C. Steele (1999, 2010) and Harper (2009, 2015) capture the essence of stereotype threats and the effects they have on Black male student success and achievement in all educational settings. Moreover, C. Steele (1999) concluded these *situational threats* influenced students' performances on standardized tests, social integration, and levels of self-esteem. Thus, the threatening environment created by stereotypes has the potential to affect a number of factors influencing the academic achievement of Black males on college campuses.

Psychological, social, and institutional factors were also identified and documented as having a detrimental impact on Black males' persistence through college. For example, Berryhill and Bee (2007) noted student's PSOC influenced co-curricular engagement, social integration, and academic effort. Lastly, institutional factors such as faculty and staff mentoring have been shown to increase Black male student retention, engagement, and academic success in college



(LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997). Although Black males face stereotypes and barriers to success at an increasingly alarming rate, tactics to combat many of these inevitable injustices have provided some level of success in advancing a small portion of this unique student population (Harper, 2006b; Sutton & Terrell, 1997; C. Steele, 1999).

### **Conclusion**

The literature exhibited above depicts how Black males are inevitably stereotyped on college campus and how these experiences influence and impact students ability to advance and persist through graduation. Stereotypes derive from the embedded nature and culture surrounding race and racism within the U.S. society. Still, it is essential to continue progression in shifting the view of Black men in college by adopting models such as Harper's (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework.

It has been noted that a variety of factors on college campus contribute to Black male collegiate success. The threatening environments created by stereotypes or stereotype threats impact psychological, physical, social, and institutional factors related to Black males success in college (Harper, 2015; Hausmann et al., 2009; McGee & Martin, 2011; Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Moreover, health factors related to stereotypes included increased heart rate, stress, hypertension, and anxiety (Baldwin, Chambliss, & Towler, 2003; Browman, 1997). Thus it has been made clear that stereotypes and the threatening environments they create do not only affect Black students psyche, but they contribute to a variety of factors affecting Black males persistence to and through the collegiate realm.

The qualitative nature of this study primarily guided by the counterstorytelling tenet of CRT seeks to capture individual perspectives and experiences related to how Black males are persisting through stereotypes in college. In regards to quantitative and qualitative research

methods, Harper (2007) suggest qualitative research is “methodologically [more] appropriate and arguably more credible” (p. 57). Identifying key indicators of how/why Black males are persisting through stereotypes is key to addressing longstanding issues related to Black male academic success in college. Examining Black males detailed accounts and experiences with stereotypes may provide insight to trends, themes, or strategies Black males utilize when navigating stereotypes and the threatening environments they create in collegiate settings.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design**

### **Introduction**

This study focused on Black males and their experiences with stereotypes in college. Specifically, this study sought to understand how Black males are persisting through college in the wake of stereotypes and the threatening environments in which they create in various academic and social settings. The phenomenological nature of this study provides insight into the lived experiences of Black males and their encounters with racial stereotypes in college. Additionally, the observational aspect of this research design deeply aimed at understanding each Black males experience with racial stereotypes in academic and social settings. As a result, conclusions were drawn regarding trends, occurrences, and ways in which Black males navigated institutional, academic, and social settings as they relate to stereotypes and stereotype threat. The research questions that guided this study are:

- (1) What stereotypes do Black males experience in college?
- (2) What affects do stereotypes have on Black male achievement in college?
- (3) In what ways, if any, are Black males persisting through stereotypes in college?

In this chapter, I describe how participants of this study were selected and who the participants are. Next, an in depth analysis of the instrumentation of the study is presented, followed by data collection and analysis techniques and procedures. Finally, a brief summary of the design of the study concludes the chapter.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study self-identified as Black/African-American males. Criterion for involvement in this study were specific and selective, thus the institution's office of institutional analysis was utilized to identify students who met the qualifications outlined below.

In collaboration with the office of institutional analysis, a recruitment email was sent to qualified participants outlining the nature of the research study and their potential involvement. I then instructed individuals seen fit for participation to contact me for detailed instructions regarding future contributions to the study. Many of the participants in this study approached me directly and asked if they were able to participate in the study after receiving the initial recruitment letter via email. In this, I utilized purposive sampling, also referred to as judgment sampling (Tongco, 2007). Purposive sampling was based upon the researcher's judgment when selecting participants for a study (Tongco, 2007). Tongco (2009) suggest when "information is held by only certain members of the community" (p. 151), purposive sampling has the ability to pinpoint members of a community who possess meaningful information others inherently lack.

Criteria for participant selection is as follows:

- An individual who identifies as Black/African American
- An individual who identifies as male
- A current undergraduate student with an academic status of sophomore, junior, or senior Grade Point Average (GPA) of 2.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a qualitative approach and phenomenological design. Qualitative approaches derived from sociological and anthropological trends in observational and ethnographic research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The written accounts of these interactions and settings were the basis of what would soon be known as qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this, sociologists were able to give a voice to marginalized populations and ultimately capture individual's perspectives and points of view resulting in what is known as a phenomenological research approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the purposes of this

research, the phenomenological approach highlights how marginalized and minoritized individual's lived experiences are able to shape and bring light to trends and occurrences regarding racial stereotypes for Black males in a variety of academic and social settings in college.

This study's approach is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of CRT, stereotype threat, and anti-deficit models discussed in chapter two. The study's phenomenological approach allows participants the opportunity to tell their stories and give detailed accounts of their lived experiences with racial stereotypes throughout their collegiate tenure. Additionally, the phenomenological nature and research design seeks to target minoritized Black males and provide them with an opportunity to speak out, giving their unheard voices an opportunity to express some of the deeply rooted issues surrounding stereotypes and the threatening environments they create. C. Steele's (1995, 1997, 1999, 2010) research surrounding stereotype threat guides the structure and makeup of the interview questions which target Black males lived experiences with racial stereotypes in college as they pertain to psychological, social, and academic factors influencing college persistence.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process consisted of two semi-structured, one-on-one interviews and an observational data collection technique. I conducted an initial one-on-one interview with each participant (See Appendix A). After completing the initial interview, I observed each participant in an academic or social setting. Immediately following the observation, each participant was interviewed a second time as a follow-up or anchored interview to observations made in the immediate academic or social setting. For the purposes of the interviews, each participant was asked to choose a private, quiet location on the institution's campus to ensure optimal levels of

comfort. Upon the start of each interview, participants were informed of their rights and voluntary nature of their participation in the research study. Each participant was briefed with anonymity and confidentiality clauses. Additionally, during initial interviews each participant was asked to select a pseudonym to protect their identity throughout the data analysis, findings, and conclusion portions of this study. Upon receiving permission to do so, each interview was audio-recorded to ensure all experiences, accounts, and details of the interview are captured for the purposes of in-depth data analysis. Furthermore, during each interview I recorded detailed notes of the participant's responses, mannerisms, attitudes, quotes, and demeanor for future analysis.

When initially interviewing participants, I asked each individual to fill out a participant information sheet. The participant information sheet allowed for the extraction of self-reported information related to participant's academic standing, co-curricular involvement, sexual orientation, grade point average (GPA), area(s) of study, and goals and aspirations. In doing so, participants provided background characteristics which may or may not influence their perception, attitudes, and ways in which they react to and deal with stereotypes in college. Following the completion of the participant information sheet, I conducted a semi-structured interview targeting participants' lived experiences with racial stereotypes, attitudes, assumptions towards racial stereotypes, and how participants deal/cope with the burden of being stereotyped by others. Although interview questions were preset, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for follow-up/probing questions to gain a better, more detailed account of the participants' experiences with racialized stereotypes in college.

During the observational portion of research, I used naturalistic observation, or an observational technique where the researcher does not manipulate the environment in which

subjects reside (Merriam & Tisdell, 2106). Thus, outside of the primary participant of the study, other individuals involved were unaware of my presence and/or observational note taking. This provided me with results that are more naturally occurring as the participants and others' actions are uncontaminated and unaltered in these naturally occurring environments. Data collected from these observations were handwritten and referenced occurrences and happenings related to racial stereotypes in the immediate social or academic setting. Quotes or phrases were used if applicable; however, information was gathered and reported in a manner that protects the anonymity of those involved. All notes, audio-recordings, and other transcribed documents were kept under lock and key or on a secured university computer.

A follow-up or “anchored interview” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 139) technique was also employed immediately after observations took place. The one-on-one anchored interviews were rooted, or anchored, in the observations I made as a researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, this semi-structured interview format obtained information related to the participant's lived experience and internalized thoughts in the immediate aftermath of a specific occurrence or happening regarding racial stereotypes, if any were presented. As a result, I was able to examine real-time observations of racial stereotypes and participant's reactions to these environments based on the interactions and interpretations of the lived experience.

During the anchored interview process, I continued to adhere to the same protocol utilized in the initial interview to obtain participant's knowing and willing consent. Moreover, the semi-structured nature of these interviews allowed me the opportunity to question participants about their interactions, perceptions, feelings, and internalizations regarding the racial stereotype(s) they experienced. Similar to previous interview techniques, I recorded notes during all one-on-one anchored interviews.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is viewed as one of, if not the most difficult processes of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the data analysis process, I utilized funds from a grant awarded for this research to obtain transcriptions of all audio-recorded interviews from a third party company specializing in audio transcriptions. A line-by-line analysis of the transcribed documents highlighted phrases, ideas, and statements made during each interview process. Line-by-line analysis is a meticulous process in which the researcher is able to pinpoint and identify key components of the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This allowed for the development of themes as I advanced through the data analysis process. In addition to line-by-line coding, I cross referenced the interview notes with the codes that emerged from the line-by-line analysis. This allowed me the opportunity to utilize a data reduction technique (thematic synthesis) often used in phenomenological analysis. When conducting qualitative research, the data gathered can appear messy, scattered, voluminous, or long-winded, thus the researcher must pair down various statements to their core meanings (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Connor, 2003). Thematic synthesis combines the ideas, concepts, and codes derived from the previous line-by-line analysis. A comparative analysis from the codes derived from observational notes was utilized following the line-by-line analysis. As a result, themes, or patterns within the data emerged, allowing me to identify commonalities and similarities within the transcribed codes and concepts extracted from interview transcripts and notes. These themes guide the conclusion and findings portion of this research.

## **Summary**

Black male undergraduate students were identified and interviewed about their experiences with stereotypes in college. The semi-structured, one-on-one interviews gave



participants the opportunity to delve deep into their lived experiences with stereotypes shedding light on how stereotypes affect students' academic, social, and psychological well-being and academic performance in college. The observational research design also provided an opportunity to explore real time insights to feelings, emotions, and interpretations experienced by Black males regarding racial stereotypes and the settings in which they occur.

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and coded during the data analysis process. Notes from observational interviews were coded and themed in accordance with audio-recorded transcriptions. Additional data analysis (thematic synthesis) was conducted producing more generalized, yet common themes among respondent's experiences with racial stereotypes, thus shaping the findings and conclusions in the forthcoming chapters.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented. Initially, I outline the demographic characteristics describing the participants and the institutional setting in which the study resided. Next, I revisit the research questions guiding the study and provide detailed descriptions of participant's interactions with stereotypes in the collegiate setting. A total of four themes emerged from the data analysis providing a clear direction and tone for the forthcoming results.

### **Context**

This study was conducted at a large (25,000+) predominantly White institution (PWI) located in the Midwestern United States. Six participants responded to the recruitment email by contacting me either in person, via email, or text message. In the initial interview, participants were asked to select a pseudonym and answer a number of demographic questions pertaining to their institutional involvement, future goals and aspirations, and academic endeavors in order for the primary researcher to be able to introduce the participants involved in the study (see Table 1).

Of the participants, three identified as seniors, two juniors, and one sophomore. Participants exhibited their leadership and involvement by serving in current or previous roles in a number of campus clubs/organizations/departments including but not limited to student government, religious groups, honor societies, student ambassadors, and program specific initiatives. Five of the six participants were observed in social and academic settings including classrooms, religious groups, work (i.e., self-identified social setting), intramural sporting events, and a self-identified "colored corner" in the university student union. More often than not, participants found themselves as the one of, if not the only, Black male in the room. This among

other factors contributed greatly to their experiences and coping strategies in the wake of stereotypes and the threatening environments they create.

Table 1

*Demographic Information*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Academic Standing</b>	<b>Current or Previous Campus Involvement</b>	<b>Future Goals/Aspirations</b>
Mayor	African-American	Senior	Bible Study Group, Student Senate	“Pursue a graduate degree or Ph.D. in psychology”
Michael	Black	Senior	Presidential Leadership Academy, Mock Trial Association, Governance/Student Senate, Model UN Group	“Lawyer and or Politician”
JD	Black	Junior	LGBT Student Ambassador, Queer and Trans People of Color	“Develop and organization that helps Black queer individuals or women centered. Own my own place.”
Trevor	African-American	Senior	Intern, resident assistant, AKPSI business fraternity, sport leadership club	“High school/college athletic director, basketball coach, founder/director of an afterschool program for troubled children.”
Chris	Black/African American	Sophomore	Peer mentor, Campus Ministry, Trio, Pre-med club	“Graduate – attain B.S., go to medical school, study abroad”
Sony	Black	Junior	National association for music education, United	“Pursue a doctoral degree and become a collegiate

Way of Lakeshore, Symphony Orchestra Volunteer, Phi Theta Kappa	teacher. Work with non-profit organization to help students in need.”
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## Findings

After analysis, four themes were identified from the audio recorded interviews and observational portions of this study. I was able to identify four themes which derived from a number of codes and concepts identified during thematic synthesis. Codes, the smallest of the three, are similarities in phrases or words extracted from the qualitative data. Concepts, group smaller codes together to form more generalized patterns of involvement and behavior, and themes are a collective of concepts signifying the most generalized and largest category stemming from qualitative data analysis procedures. The four themes obtained from this analysis were: (1) Internalization (2) Stereotypes (3) Persistence (4) Advice (see Appendix B). Each theme is accompanied by concepts or what might be seen as sub-themes within the context of this chapter.

### Internalization

Respondents of this study not only spoke about their prior experiences with stereotypes during interviews, but I was able to view five of the six participants in “real time” capturing first-hand experiences, reactions, and ways in which these individuals dealt with stereotypes in academic and social settings on a college campus. Three concepts derived from this larger theme: (1) Emotions/Feelings (2) Containment (3) Questioning. Throughout these experiences, participants not only felt specific instances of anger, frustration, and annoyance, more often than not many of those emotions/feelings were suppressed in the moment as participants internalized these emotions and began questioning themselves and others.

**Emotions/feelings.** Feelings and emotions displayed and or expressed by participants were simply anger or frustration. Michael simply states his feelings that come about during stereotype situations as “Anger.. straight up.” Additionally, when asked about his emotions in the immediate aftermath of an observation where he was perceived to have been stereotyped, Trevor stated “emotions are high, uh a little frustrated, angry.” However, as emotions of anger and frustration arise, Chris also described an added emotion when speaking about his experiences: “So, as far as feeling and emotions, I think that feeling of, you [know], kind of almost anger but at the same time, like, wanting to inform.” This sense of not wanting to overreact and seemingly inform others of how their actions affect those around them directly relates to the second concept, containment.

**Containment.** Trevor described this concept with precision when he stated, “But, I have felt like I couldn’t display my full self because of reactions of other people.” The concept of containment is summed up in Trevor’s quote as participants are seemingly forced, or feel as if they must alter or contain their true selves in fear of being judged, ridiculed, or rejected as a result of their expressed emotions. Michael described the “pressure” experienced during stereotype situations as “help[ing] to kind of contain my anger and then vent that anger or express that anger in a more positive way.” Additionally, Trevor stated that this containment hindered some of his abilities in the classroom when engaging with the larger group:

It happened to me a few times in classes, like, where I was honestly the only black student in a class of 40. It's kind of like teachers- Like, if I had a question, I wouldn't know if I really wanted to ask it because I didn't want people to look at me like, "Oh, he's not ... How does he not understand this?" And things like that, so I felt uncomfortable, like, displaying my unsureness in the classroom.

**Questioning.** Participants also spoke of the ambivalent nature they endured when internalizing emotions and feelings when being stereotyped. Similar to Trevor's experience when containing his classroom engagement as a result of perceived stereotypes from classmates, JD stated, "You're always questioning how others view you." He goes on and highlights the internal battle he experiences on somewhat of a daily basis: "I try to pick and choose what stereotypes I'm going to, I'm going to try to dispel, which one's I'm going to have to, at some point, internalize, and have a constant conversation with myself about it."

Sony described his internal struggle as a mixture of frustration and fatigue as he constantly has to battle with what is appropriate and how to speak up when threatened by stereotypes:

Here it goes again, I knew we were gonna get to this point. And then anger, um, not being able to just like always being seen like as the black friend instead of just as, as a friend. And then you have to be courageous and actually speak up about it, so sometimes it's like an inner battle with yourself conflict do I let this slide, or do I address it, so.

This concept of questioning and ambivalence is passionately portrayed by Mayor as an indescribable emotional rollercoaster:

I can't even put a feeling with it, but it, it's the feeling... but it's, man, they just, why do they feel that way, you understand? Well, I know why they feel that way, but man, what can be done to change their views? I understand how they feel, but you can say still it's still hurtful. It's still, still hurtful.

Although it is apparent many Black males struggle with this sense of internalization, as exhibited through many participants quotes and experiences, much of the ambivalence stems from wanting to inform others of their racial ignorance and intolerance. Forthcoming themes and concepts

explore how the Black males in this study persisted through these emotionally bound situations surrounding stereotypes and the threatening environments they create.

## **Stereotypes**

This theme was developed from a total of four concepts: (1) Prejudice/Preconceived Notions (2) Stereotype Threat (3) Microaggressions and (4) Normalcy of Racial Stereotypes.

**Prejudice/preconceived notions.** Among the other codes exhibited in Appendix B, Black male participants overwhelmingly experienced racial stereotypes in the form of preconceived notions about their intelligence or area of work/study they were expected to engage in. Both Michael and Mayor spoke of their experiences within the same student organization on campus where they were expected and/or selected to sit on the “diversity affairs committee” due to what they perceived to be preconceived notions about their interest and involvement. Michael highlights this notion in an analogy to his experiences in the classroom:

You know one of the reasons that automatically gives off the fact that you're being stereotyped is the difference in how other people are treated. Right? So the white boy sitting next to me is not expected to become a civil rights lawyer. The white boy sitting next to me is, is expect to become a CEO or a corporate lawyer, like I want to be.

Additionally, Michael is quoted as describing what I called the *exceptional negro concept* experienced by many Black males in intellectual and/or collegiate settings:

“They automatically got what they think of you in their head. And it's either they think that you're just like you're supposed to be as a black man, you're unintelligent, you're uneducated, you're going nowhere, or somehow that you're exceptionally bright, um, as if you're, you know, that's different than the normal.”

**Stereotype threat.** C. Steele (2010) describes stereotype threat as the pressure an environment creates due the fear of confirming and/or being judged as a result of the stereotype other impose upon you. Chris explains his experience with the threatening environments stereotypes create for him:

I would never say I felt threatened but I felt intimidated in different occurrences. I don't know if it was because of stereotypes necessarily but just being in an environment where, you are maybe, the only person of color or the only black person or the only black male. These threatening environments or perceived environments also hindered Chris' ability to join or even consider Greek organizations on campus: "And I think because of my stereotype that I felt like they were going to stereotype me or, you know, I was going to feel uncomfortable or, you know, it wasn't my, um, environment." Similarly, Michael stating, "There are a lot of social interactions that I, I kind of stay away from because of stereotypes." These instances of avoidance and lack of engagement possess severe implications on Black males' persistence in the collegiate realm.

**Microaggressions.** Many of the threats created by stereotypes exist as a result of microaggressions. Microaggressions, also described by some as death by a thousand paper cuts, refers to the repeated insults, slander, or racial interactions frequently encountered by people of color (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Also ever participant spoke of, or was observed in, a situation where a microaggression was exhibited. Sony's coworker called him by another coworker's name during his observation. During the follow-up interview I asked him why he thought that happened and he expressed that he and his coworker were often confused for each other due to the color of their skin. These subtle racial instances are described by Chris as an encounter he had during his involvement within a religious organization on campus:



As soon as I got there he was like, uh, hey Chris what's up? And I told him what's up and then he immediately goes for the handshake where it's like, you being it in, and then you do the little tap on the back instead of like the regular handshake. So I think that kin of notion of being, like, oh like that's what I do, like, since I'm a Black man. Like, I shake hands like that.

Due to the frequent nature of these experiences, the overwhelming majority of participants spoke of the seemingly normal nature of experiencing stereotypes at their Midwestern PWI.

**Normalcy of racial stereotypes.** The saliency of CRT is exhibited in this concept. The inevitable nature of stereotypes was described by participants as “nothing new” or simply “being used to it”. Trevor elaborates,

Just the environment we live in in this area is honestly not shocking, so like at this point of being here for four years, it's kind of like you're going to experience things, and I can't let it, like ... prolong an effect on my behavior, I guess, for a long period of time.

Similarly, Sony describes his experiences with stereotypes as normal and something he has come to “expect” during his collegiate tenure noting,

Yeah, I'm kinda used to it [stereotypes]. Like, I guess I don't get upset because, I mean, I feel like, I expect that to happen.” Sony goes on to state that, “uncomfortability is just something I have to live with.... Uncomfortability just became normal, something I had to deal with.

Thus, insinuating an additional burden/load Black males carry with them as they navigate institutions of higher education.

## **Persistence**

The persistence theme was exhibited through four concepts described as (1) Confronting Stereotypes (2) Ignoring Stereotypes (3) Dispelling Stereotypes and (4) Alleviating Pressure. Following Harper's (2012) anti-deficit model, this theme (persistence) highlights how participants were able to excel and persist through the threatening environments they faced as a result of racial stereotypes in both social and academic settings.

**Confronting stereotypes.** Participants saw confronting stereotypes as one of the most effective ways of educating others on how and why what they say can be interpreted or perceived as threatening or unjust. Michael states that when he confronts racial ignorance and injustices he utilizes a tactic of asking questions to dig deeper and get to the basis or root of helping others realized what they are saying/doing:

But I do speak my mind and I definitely tell them, you know. Or, or at least ask them questions and make them get as to why, because sometimes people can be stereotypical of races and not really realize that they're being that because the system is designed to whereas long as you're not on that side and you don't know what's going on.

Michael then elaborates on his approach in these varying situations:

And I think if you do it in a way that doesn't expel them from the conversation, doesn't isolate them in the conversation they're more likely to engage, and they're more likely to see your point of view, and then they're more likely to say, "You know what? You're right. I understand why you would feel that way."

Chris employs similar tactics stating, "It's almost like you want to inform this person but not in that stereotypical quote on quote way using harsh words or anything like that." Moreover, Sony spoke about his success when employing these types of tactics in an environment with his friend

group, a self-described place where he experiences stereotypes the most in college: “My friends always make those racial jokes which are decreasing now because I’m calling people on them when they say it.”

**Ignoring stereotypes.** Alternatively, some participants chose to simply ignore many of the stereotypes and microaggressions they experience so frequently as a result of fatigue. McGee and Martin (2011) describe being fed up with this frequency of racialized experiences as racial battle fatigue. JD expresses his frustration and tactic of utilizing this means to an end in some instances:

It's stressful being a college student, sometimes. I'm, I'm out here trying to type papers, I'm out here trying to study for my exams and things, so some days I'm just like, you know, I'm just going to choose to ignore it... it's not my [fault]... I feel like Google is free, there are a lot of different people talking about this, talking about this exact same subject, and I should not have to be your black teacher, so, you know, some days, as a friend once told me, some days, you know, I'm 'off-duty Black.'

Michael also experienced some instances of racial battle fatigue as he expressed simply being tired and exhausted from having to constantly deal with stereotypes:

Every room that you walk into you have to convince a different set of people um, and you have to show how you're not like the stereotypes that you just got done dispelling in the next room. And after a while it just, it gets, it gets very tiring.

Although there is a seemingly inevitable weight imposed on Black male collegians in regards to stereotypes while enrolled, Chris highlights his expectation of the inevitable and how he employs an anti-deficit framework when ignoring stereotypes: “I already know what to expect and adjust

some to that...Just being, you know, conscientious, but also like, not kind of letting that, almost dictate my experience.”

**Dispelling stereotypes.** Participants spoke of ways in which they dispel stereotypes but utilizing tactics such as codeswitching, overcompensating, and using stereotypes as fuel/motivation for success in academic and social settings. In regards to codeswitching, Sony spoke about having a “second face” he would put on during certain instances:

But when [Black males] go into a professional setting we have to switch, flip the switch and be the second person, this two-faced person, not in a bad way, but you know, so that the world isn't offended by our culture or, you know, the way that we do things, our comfortability.

He goes on to tell a detailed story about a time when he had to employ this tactic around what he described as “important people” at the institution claiming, “Of course [there] was that second face that I would have to put on because I want to have a good impression, and I didn’t want them to see those stereotypes, see them play out those stereotypes or anything.” Sony employed this tactic so often that during observations, he didn’t even realize how much he altered his voice, tone, and language when speaking on the phone and to other colleagues in the office proclaiming he is so accustomed to codeswitching that it has become unconscious in nature.

Other participants like Chris, spoke of breaking down those stereotypes and hashing away at them in regards to overcompensation: “You wanna dispel them and you wanna break down those barriers to, like, kind of hash away that stereotype.” JD also took an optimistic perspective to breaking down stereotypes by stating, “I kind of use it to my advantage, because when you, when you think I'm a certain way, and I go above and beyond that to prove you wrong... I get some satisfaction out of it.” This additional “advantage” described by JD also

flourished during Michael's passionate explanation of how stereotypes fueled his acceptance and view of the collegiate experience:

Because society telling me that black men doesn't go to college. And I, I was determined that I'm going to college, I don't care what anybody has to say, I'm not going to jail, I'm going to college. And I'm going to graduate from college and I'm going to make a lot of money because black people don't do it.

This optimistic or Anti-deficit approach taken by Black males in college is precisely how these unique individuals are persisting in the wake of stereotypes today.

**Alleviating pressure.** Alleviating pressure for many participants came in the form of choosing and selecting mature and culturally competent friend groups to surround themselves with throughout their collegiate tenure. Sony spoke not only of friend groups, but of the significance institutional administrators played in his success in persisting through stereotypes:

When I got to college I started being around people who were quick to combat those kind of stereotypes, and so I think that gave me more ideas and more courage to it, to call people out on it when they...said things like that.

Moreover, Sony describes his experiences consulting institutional administrators,

[Surrounding myself with] other people who are in the college settings who are highly educated people [because] they've dealt with systematic racism and not just that, that face to face racism that you might face on the street. I think I've, I've learned more of how to, how to deal with that... if that makes sense.

### **Advice**

Although advice was the shortest of the four themes, this was due to the blunt and frank nature in which participants spoke about providing advice to younger Black male collegians:

Speak up, and speak up early because you know, when you stay silent, you give authority to it. You, you give permission to people you stay silent to, to do that. So if you are offended, if there is something that is bugging you, just speak up, just say something.

Um, because that's how you, that's how you change it. (Micahel)

Not only did participants urge others to speak up and stay active in their engagement when facing stereotypes, they encourage younger Black males to be themselves:

Don't try to be someone you're not, and, and appreciate you for who you are. And just because everything around you looks a certain way doesn't mean that you should have.... you have to look that way too. It's okay to be, to be different, and, and mold your own personality. (Sony)

Others utilized the anti-deficit model once more and encouraged younger Black males to believe in themselves and not feel pressured by outside forces: “Don't feel pressured by other people to, um, to fit into what they want you to be, and definitely just believe in yourself, believe in your own magic, believe in your own practice.” (JD)

These words of advice contradict some of the previous tactics employed by others insinuating that with age, participants became more mature, confident, and seemingly grew into their Black bodies reminiscent of Cross' (1971) theory of Black identity development.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, participants described the ways in which they experience, deal with, and persist through racial stereotypes and the threatening environments they create. In regards to experiencing stereotypes, participants overwhelmingly stated the inevitability of facing stereotypes and stereotype threats in college. This inevitability highlights the *normalcy of racism* tenant of CRT. Types of stereotypes experienced were mainly in the form of preconceived notions,

prejudice, or microaggressions from their predominately White counterparts. Moreover, participants described being used to these types of experiences and in many cases simply ignoring them due to the continuous nature in which they would occur.

However, although frequently occurring, participants described an internalization of feelings and emotions hinting at perceived psychological trauma as a result of being stereotyped. Many participants contained their true selves or found themselves holding back and subduing their emotions and academic and social engagement on campus as a result of experiencing stereotypes.

Nevertheless, participants were able to employ tactics such as confronting and dispelling stereotypes in an effort to persist through the threatening environments they created. Some even found a sense of joy and accomplishment when proving others wrong in these situations. This anti-deficit approach continued as participants urged younger Black males to speak up in the wake of stereotypes, confront others by asking questions, and fight through the threatening environment to dispel future instances of stereotyping.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

In this chapter, I provide a contextualized summary of the entirety of the research study. Next, a broad, yet concise conclusion is drawn from the findings of the study. Following the conclusion, a discussion is constructed aligning the results and findings of this study with theoretical framework and existing literature discussed in chapter two. Finally, recommendations and suggestions are made for future research and practice regarding Black male collegians.

### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify ways in which Black collegiate males persist through stereotypes and the threatening environments they create. In achieving this goal, I utilized a phenomenological approach to highlight the lived experiences of Black males enrolled at a PWI in the Midwestern United States. The theoretical framework utilized in this study (i.e., stereotype threat, anti-deficit framework, and CRT) highlight key components and underlying issues facing Black male collegians. Utilizing these frameworks, I was able to hone in on specific aspects of the pre-existing literature such as CRT's counterstorytelling and normalcy of racism tenants. The anti-deficit approach used in this study sought to undermine the negative perceptions of Black males' collegiate experiences and highlight how Black males are persisting through the inevitability of threatening environments created by stereotypes.

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

- (1) What stereotypes do Black males experience in college?
- (2) What affects do stereotypes have on Black male achievement in college?
- (3) In what ways, if any, are Black males persisting through stereotypes in college?



The design of this study focused not only on interviewing participants in a semi-structured one-on-one setting, but I also observed participants in both academic and social settings. Participants were recruited for this study through a series of recruitment emails outlining the nature of the study and their participation. For consideration for participation in the study, participants self-identified with the following criteria: 1) Black/African American, 2) male, and 3) have a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher and 4) enrolled at the institution for at least one academic year.

Initial semi-structured one-on-one interviews questioned participants on their past and current experiences with stereotypes examining interactions, emotions, and instances in which participants had been stereotyped before and during college. Along with individual one-on-one interviews, I observed participants first hand in both academic and social settings to grasp an in-depth perspective of how students act, interpret, and deal with stereotypes and the threatening environments in which they create. Following each observation, I interviewed participants for a second time to investigate feelings, emotions, and reactions to stereotypes in these immediate settings in an effort to better understand how participants were persisting through these situations. A total of six (6) participants conducted one-on-one interviews while only five (5) participated in observations. After data was collected and analyzed, a total of 49 codes, 13 concepts, and 4 themes. The four themes emerging from the data were (1) Internalization (2) Stereotypes (3) Persistence and (4) Advice.

### **Conclusion**

Through their counterstorytelling narrative, participants were able to not only articulate their experiences with stereotypes, but they also brought to light how they dealt with these experiences, how these experiences shaped future endeavors, and how they used various

strategies to deal with and persist through these threatening experiences. In addition, participants explained the psychological and social implications associated with constantly being stereotyped in college. For example, participants experienced instances of fatigue, overcompensation, and feelings of internalization, questioning, and containment of emotions in stereotype threat situations. Overall, participant's feelings and attitudes towards dealing with stereotypes was exhibited in their advice to other incoming Black male collegians. The feedback included: speaking up, directly confront instances of stereotypes, and asking questions in the pursuit of educating others on topics of race and racism when being stereotyped.

### **Discussion**

In almost every observation I viewed, participants internalized feelings and emotions brought forth by being stereotyped by others. Additionally, during one-on-one interviews, participants described in detail how their feelings and emotions were affected by being stereotyped by others. In this, feelings of anxiety, pressure, fear, ambivalence, and confusion were all brought forth by stereotypes and stereotype threats. Browman (1997), C. Steele (1995), and Utsey (1998) all contend that stereotypes and stereotype threats are linked to health risk factors which may have an effect on academic persistence and retention. Dahlvig (2010) contends feelings of isolation could impact rates of persistence and retention among African-American students at PWIs. Additionally, psychological affects such as internalization can lead to psychological stressors (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Although instances of internalization occurred more often than not, as participants continued their efforts to combat and dispel stereotypes in their later years of college, they began to directly address these instances realizing that silence gives to acceptance and tolerance. Moreover, Harper (2015) found that participants in his study rejected the notion of suppressing or internalizing feelings and emotions when

stereotyped by others contributing to the action oriented suggestions and advice made by the overwhelming majority of participants in this study.

Along with psychological implications, in many instances participants explained how stereotypes shaped their social interactions and experiences as well. Walton and Cohen (2007) describe the, “mistrust of the motives behind other people’s treatment” (p. 83) as a result of experiencing or perceiving a stereotype or threatening environment. Participants of this study either chose not to participate in a campus organization because of how they perceived they would be stereotyped (i.e., joining a fraternity), or after they had been stereotyped by others in social environments (i.e., friend groups, student government, religiously affiliated campus organizations). As a result, these students were less engaged on campus highlighting Astin’s (1984) and Tinto’s (1993) suggestions that students who are less engaged on campus suffer more academically directly relating to measures of persistence.

Participants did find comfort in associating with other Black people on campus whether that be colleagues, peers, mentors, faculty members, or administrators. Often times, participants stated that same-raced institutional administrators provided support, guidance, and hope for future endeavors. Lavant, Anderson, and Tiggs (1995) found that minority students, specifically Black males, found it comforting and beneficial for in their educational and social gains when accompanied by a mentor. Additionally, Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) found that forming a research focused with faculty or staff members was of more benefit than simply forming a social mentoring relationship. However, the results from this study indicate non-research focused mentor-mentee relationships can also have significant affects on Black male collegiate persistence. This not only highlights ways in which Black males are persisting through stereotypes in college, it also gives way to how administrators can actively provide an outlet for

many Black males facing psychological and social barriers within the collegiate realm. Moreover, Black students joining same-raced organizations, developing relationships with same-raced mentors, and surrounding themselves with competent, open-minded, and often same-race friend groups proved successful in an effort to persist through many of the threatening environments created by stereotypes. Harper's (2006b, 2009) and Harper and Quaye's (2007) studies support the results of this study solidifying the fact that Black male collegiate success can often be fostered and supported by same-raced peer groups or organizations.

One of the five tenets of CRT was highlighted more significantly than others when interpreting the results of this study. The *normalcy of racism* tenant explains how daily interactions and experiences surrounding racism for people of color is seemingly a "normal science" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 7). This tenant was made most salient as many participants of this study explained how stereotypes, microaggressions, and other instances of racism were something they experience so often that it was "not shocking" or they were "used to it", and would simply ignore comments or actions of stereotypes against them. In this, the *normalcy of racism* tenant is brought forth signifying how accustomed Black males are to experiencing racial stereotypes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This tactic of ignoring stereotypes was used by many participants of this study in their younger years, however as they grew older, participants explained how ignoring these instances was simply not okay highlighting a means of persisting through these threatening environments created by stereotypes. This direct method of confronting stereotypes was also displayed in the *advice* theme as participants provided the suggestion of speaking up earlier to young Black males entering the collegiate realm. Harper's (2015) research suggest that when Black males "[s]killfully [c]onfront[] [s]tereotypes" (p. 664)

they are able to engage in more meaningful and constructive conversations with their White counterparts about their conscious or unconscious racially insensitive comments/remarks.

Participants explained how the majority of stereotypes they encounter stem from subtle yet threatening experiences with microaggressions and prejudice/preconceived notions. Participants outlined how the two intertwined, expressing how prejudice and preconceived notions played a significant role when instances of microaggressions would occur. For instance, the preconceived notion that Black males are incapable and unintelligent might trigger a microaggression of a White student telling a Black male that the only reason the Black male was accepted into college was due to the color of his skin rather than his intellectual ability. Moreover, participants stated their lack of classroom engagement was hindered by the perceived stereotype that others saw them as intellectually incapable. C. Steele (2010) acknowledges and reaffirms this belief when he explains how stereotypes can create a threatening environment for students simply due to the “pressure not to confirm the stereotype for fear of being judged or treated in terms of it” (p. 89). Although one participant described this specific instance in this way, the majority of the participants of this study highlighted the fact that blatant stereotypes, preconceived notions, or microaggressions fueled their ability to work harder and dispel the negative stereotype that was placed upon them. These instances of dispelling stereotypes address Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit model question stating, “What compels one to speak and participate actively in a courses in which he is the only Black student” (p. 5). This anti-deficit framework and ideology utilized by Black males in academia provide significant insight to how and why these unique and brilliant minds combat stereotypes and utilize others ignorance and intolerance to propel their own academic and social advancements.

## Recommendations for Practice

Participants were clear in their responses and alluded to a number of practices and policies institutions could adopt to increase persistence and retention efforts for Black male collegians. For a number of Black males on campus, they sought after same-raced professionals to guide, facilitate, and foster their growth and development as mentors to young budding Black male undergraduate students. In this, simply increasing the number of Black male faculty and staff could prove effective as these individuals will not only provide Black male undergraduates with a mentor outside of the classroom, it will seemingly provide Black males with the idea that Black males are successful, competent, and able to achieve scholarship dispelling stereotypes surrounding this group of individuals. Additionally, increasing Black male students, staff, and faculty could prove significant in dispelling stereotypes, misconceptions, and preconceived notions surrounding this group for all institutional constituents. Therefore, strategic initiatives surrounding Black male recruitment, retention, and hiring practices would see fit for advancing the Black male faculty and staff population on campus. T. Steele (2016) found that faculty and staff of color perceived upper level administrators as simply providing *lip service* rather than taking institutional action in implementing new initiatives such as mentoring programs and professional developments focused on minoritized staff members. For example, providing pre-college mentoring programs for Black males in postsecondary education not only provides incoming Black males with mentors in college, it brings to the light the mentoring process in general for all future and current Black male collegians.

Second, students continuously spoke of internalizing thoughts and emotions related to stereotypes and the threatening environments they create which lead to severe psychological and social implications. Still, participants never mentioned seeking or being offered assistance or

help in the form of counseling or psychological services on campus. Such services with intentional outreach, marketing, and planning focused on Black male collegians would help alleviate the pressures and trauma stereotype threats have the potential to cause. Creating groups or sub-groups focused on males of color, and in this case Black males, might prove beneficial in dispelling the stigma surrounding counseling services while targeting a specific student population who are in need.

Third, Black male participants of this study suggested having a mentor or role model as a driving force for their success on campus. Mentors and role models not only provided an avenue for Black males to express their frustration and concern, they also provided guidance in navigating institutional settings and situations. Specifically, one participant noted these individuals have had more experience with subtle forms of stereotypes in the shape of microaggressions and preconceived notions and are able to provide suggestions and oversight to ways in which they have dealt with stereotypes in their prior experiences. In addition, mentors serve as campus resources to provide Black males with an opportunity to utilize the *counterstorytelling* tenant of CRT in expressing and voicing their concerns to others. With this, institutional leaders can provide Black males with an avenue to voice their opinions, concerns, and highlight key components or situations faculty and staff might not be aware of at the time. Furthermore, implementing intentional mentoring programs for Black male collegians in this way would serve as a means in strategically aligning undergraduates with graduate students and professionals at the institution who may be able to provided an outlet for young Black males on campus. Other suggestions may include implementing Black male living learning communities, scholarship programs, or peer-to-peer initiatives with mentoring components to try and alleviate some of the affects stereotypes play in Black male student persistence.

Finally providing students with stereotype threat bystander intervention training or a similar seminar as component of the general education requirements of the institution might reduce the impact of the number of stereotype threat situations occurring on campus while simultaneously educating the student population of this prominent issue facing many Black male students. If incoming students are being educated on the importance and influence they can have on the experiences of others, it will only positively impact cross cultural interactions and relations. In turn, this could reduce the number of stereotypes occurring on campus ultimately impacting ways in which Black males persist through the collegiate realm. For instance, as stereotypes decrease, Black males may be more willing to experience and engage in a number of on-campus activities contributing to academic and social successes. With this, stereotype interactions have the potential to decrease and become more rare and less frequent providing Black males with less barriers in obtaining and persisting to and through a collegiate degree.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study focused on Black collegiate males and how they persist through college in the wake of stereotypes and the threatening environments they create. Future research should expand on how multiple intersecting identities represented within Black male collegians (e.g., gay, multiracial, athletes, etc.) play a role in their persistence at colleges or universities. Insight into these intersectionalities might result in differing experiences for the vast amount of Black male collegians holding various salient identities.

Although observational techniques were utilized to obtain a more detailed account of the participants experience with stereotypes in the immediate setting, observational settings can be more controlled. For example, only viewing Black males in academic classroom settings rather than academic and social settings.



Finally, the study could be expanded and include more participants at various ranges in their academic tenures. Focusing on specific academic years (i.e., sophomore, junior, senior) would provide specific insight and highlight how Black males are specifically persisting from year to year.

## Appendix A

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. What stereotypes do you think people hold against you?
  - a. Good and Bad...
3. Have you ever been stereotyped before you came to college?
  - a. How did you persist through these stereotypes and continue on to college?
  - b. Do you still employ similar tactics to deal with stereotypes while you are in college?
4. How do you know someone is stereotyping you or holds a stereotype towards an identity group you possess?
  - a. What do they do?
  - b. How do they act?
5. What do they say? Can you give me an example of a time you were stereotyped in college?
  - a. If so... what was the stereotype?
  - b. How did you react when you were stereotyped?
    - i. Do you think that Black males are trying to dispel the stereotype(s)?
    - ii. Do you think Black males are trying to conform to the stereotype(s)?
6. Where do you experience stereotypes the most? (ie: social setting, academic setting, specific area of campus, etc.)
7. What are some feelings/emotions that come about when you perceive someone holds a stereotype against you?

- a. What are some ways in which you handle or deal with your emotions when someone is holding stereotypes against you?
8. Have you ever felt threatened in an environment as a result of a perceived stereotype?
9. Have you ever felt uncomfortable in a setting as a result of a perceived stereotype from another individual?
  - a. If so... what did that feel like? (Pressured, anxious, nervous, etc.)
10. What did you do when faced with this challenge? Have you ever tried to conform to or dispel a stereotype someone else held against you? (maybe this was in a particular setting, group, or just in general [ie: advancing your education])
11. Have you ever felt that stereotypes have hindered or excelled your academic performance in the classroom?
12. Have you ever felt that stereotypes have hindered your social experiences?
  - a. If yes, what did you do when faced with this scenario?
13. Similarly, have you ever participated, or not participated in an event, group, or activity due to a perceived stereotype someone may have against you?
14. How do you think stereotypes have shaped your academic endeavors in college?
15. Have your experiences with stereotypes shaped your involvement with university groups, clubs, or organizations?
16. What advice, if any, would you give your younger self about dealing with stereotypes?

## Appendix B

Themes	Concepts	Codes
Internalization	Emotions/Feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Isolation</li> <li>- Fatigue</li> <li>- Annoyance</li> <li>- Don't belong</li> <li>- Anger, Fear, Anxiety, Nervous, Stress, Isolation</li> <li>- Confusion</li> </ul>
	Containment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Controlling, Subduing, Alteration of emotions and true self</li> <li>- Holding back</li> <li>- Do it to protect my emotions</li> </ul>
	Questioning (ambivalence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Questioning emotions &amp; reactions</li> <li>- Questioning reaction/decisions/thoughts</li> <li>- Questioning others intentions</li> </ul>
Stereotypes	Prejudice/Preconceived Notions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Owning certain clothing/shoes</li> <li>- "Angry Black Man" (violent)</li> <li>- Low S.E.S./Poor</li> <li>- Unintelligent or Incapable</li> <li>- Blackness as threatening</li> <li>- Area of study/interest</li> <li>- Listen to specific types of music</li> <li>- "Exceptional Negro"</li> </ul>
	Stereotype Threat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not speaking up in class</li> <li>- Only person of color in environment</li> <li>- Avoiding certain groups/student orgs</li> <li>- Questioning existence in this space</li> </ul>
	Microaggressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mannerisms/Body Language</li> <li>- jokes</li> <li>- articulation (phrases, sayings, slang)</li> <li>- avoidance/silence</li> <li>- handshakes</li> </ul>
	Normalcy of Racial Stereotypes	

Persistence	Confronting Stereotypes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- not shocking</li> <li>- used to it</li> <li>- nothing new</li> <li>- Directly address</li> <li>- Question others intentions/meaning</li> <li>- Educating others</li> </ul>
	Ignoring Stereotypes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fatigue... “Off duty Black”</li> <li>- Brush it off</li> <li>- Don’t let it dictate my actions</li> </ul>
	Dispelling Stereotypes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using stereotype as fuel/motivation for success</li> <li>- Overcompensate</li> <li>- Not feeding into what others want</li> <li>- Codeswitching</li> </ul>
	Alleviating Pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involvement in student orgs of color</li> <li>- Friends/Friend groups (same race)</li> <li>- Role Models, Mentors, Administrators (same race)</li> </ul>
Advice	Speak up!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Silence gives authority to stereotypes</li> <li>- Confront</li> <li>- Ask Probing Questions (Why?)</li> </ul>
	Be yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Don’t feed into what others want you to be</li> </ul>

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