

1-1-2004

Contrasting Black male stereotypes with the voices of successful Black male college students at a predominantly white institution: A qualitative study

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Recommended Citation

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Contrasting Black Male Stereotypes with the Voices of Successful Black Male

College Students at a Predominantly White Institution: A Qualitative Study

(TITLE)

BY

Crystal Donnette Verdun

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN COLLEGE STUDENT AFFAIRS

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2004

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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Contrasting Black Male Stereotypes with the Voices of Successful Black male
College Students at a Predominantly White Institution: A Qualitative Study

by

Crystal Donnette Verdun

July 2004

A THESIS

Submitted to

Eastern Illinois University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN COLLEGE STUDENT AFFAIRS

Department of Counseling and Student Development

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the influences and the perceptions that affect the success of Black men in college. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to find out how stereotypes affect Black men and what might keep more Black men retained to graduation from institutions of higher education. The participants for this study were selected from the Black male population at a mid-sized predominantly White institution located in the Midwest.

Results from this study include the role that familial relationships, society, institutional environment, and self perception play in the lives of five Black college students. The participants were all involved on campus at some point during their college career, came from varying home settings, and completed all four years of their education at the predominantly White institution that was the site of the present study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have been instrumental in the completion of this project. This project came out of my desire to understand my Black male counterparts. Whether it was asking about my thesis or pushing me to take the comprehensive exam instead, a lot of people had a hand in making this project come to fruition.

I have to thank God for blessing me with the many opportunities that I have had in life. A lot of my people are not 'supposed' to make it this far, but with his help, here I am.

Dr. James A. Wallace, my thesis chair, all of the hard work and patience on both ends has definitely paid off. You pushed me to my limits and I realize how much stronger I have become. You have taught me to ask questions, and to voice my opinion. I am also in the process of learning how to stay calm and not over react. Thanks for the times when you told me to take my paper and sit by the lake. Thanks for telling me to get some sleep and clear my head.

Dr. Charles G. Eberly, my professor, and friend. Thanks for all your understanding throughout my two years as your student. I appreciate your patience and your kindness. My journey would not have been as unique without you by my side. Thanks for telling me that I was strong when I did not think I could be. Thank you for all of your help and your guidance.

Dr. Richard Roberts, thank you for jumping on board and helping make this thesis project come together. I really appreciate all of your help. Thank you for being on my committee.

Robert (Bob) Wilczynski, my supervisor, mentor, and friend. You have no idea how much your friendship, and kind heart means to me. I could go on and on with compliments but thank you sums it up. You were there for me every step of the way. I learned so much from you this year and I look forward to working with you in the future. You helped turn my world right side up again.

Derrick E. Albert, my best friend. You are a strong Black man and you have taught me more than you know. Thanks for always having my back and being by my side. You are truly a blessing from God. Keep being a great example for brothers everywhere.

Garry Cooke, you were my classmate and you are my friend. Thank you for proofreading my thesis and asking questions. Thank you for letting me vent.

My family has been there for me every step of the way. Whether it was giving me tissue because I thought I wasn't going to make it or it was telling me that you loved me every time we spoke, I thank you all. Mom you are the strongest woman that I know. Thank you. To my sisters, my brothers, and my nieces and nephews thank you for your patience with me. This has been a long journey and now I am finally free to spend more time with you all.

To A.C, you helped me find participants for my study. You asked me about once a week if I was 'done with my thesis yet.' I cannot express what you mean to me. Thank you for putting up with my mood swings, good and bad. Thanks for sacrificing sleep and your personal space for me. Because of you I have learned to open my heart again. Thank you for being one of the positive brothers in my life. You will do great things, and you will be great. I am hoping that I will always be there for the ride. Love you.

And finally, to the participants who made all of this possible. I can not thank you enough for your participation in this study. Your honesty and willingness to share your stories with me is more than appreciated. I wish you all great things. You are all strong Black brothers. Keep your head up.

DEDICATION

for D and A

To my brothers who had to deal with a lot of life's unfortunate events. I love both of you with all of my heart. I never thought I was better; I never tried to change either of you. I only wanted to lead. I pray that all of your dreams and lifes' desires come true. Your big sister loves you.

PROLOGUE

Growing up as a Black person is a challenge, especially if one grows up in a lower to middle class area and in a single parent home. My brothers, my older sister and I were raised in a single parent home. As we grew up I noticed a difference between my brothers and my sister and me. My brothers felt outside pressures, and struggled to understand what it meant to be a Black man. I attributed the differences in our childhood to our absent father and lack of positive male role models.

As time went by, our older sister moved out, and a couple of years later I moved out and went to college. My brothers, on the other hand, did not leave home but fell prey to the streets, and they both dropped out before completing high school.

Looking back, I now realize that according to societal expectations, my brothers were supposed to drop out of school and not be successful. My brothers are Black, and Black men are not supposed to "make it," because that is what society wants. Often, we find Black men succumbing to street life reflected in the stereotypes portrayed in the movies. Most of the movies that hit the big screen during my upbringing were gangsta movies. Movies like Juice, New Jack City, and Menace to Society were filled with big name rap stars as their main characters. In their roles they glorified street life, guns, and violence. The Black characters were always out to get to the top even if it meant killing one another.

The image of Black men not mattering was also apparent in my brothers' classroom settings. Their teachers were demeaning and it seemed as though they just wanted their paycheck at the end of the month. One teacher told one of my brothers that he 'should be more like,' his sister, me! Instead of providing motivation for him to

achieve, her statement only caused a strain on our relationship as brother and sister.

This was a problem because, as a Black man, the teacher wanted him to be more like a woman. Teachers' expectations of both of my brothers were very low and this was evident in the way they were treated. My mother tried desperately to get them back into school, and after several years and hard learned lessons, they finally completed school on their own motivation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
DEDICATION.....	vii
PROLOGUE.....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	x
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Research Questions.....	4
Significance of the Study.....	4
Limitations of the Study.....	5
Definitions.....	6
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	7
Parental Influence.....	11
Societal Influence and Stereotypes.....	12
Institutional Environment.....	14
Perception of Self.....	16
Summary of Literature.....	18
III. METHODOLOGY.....	19
Purpose of the Study.....	19
Qualitative Design.....	19
Setting.....	20
Participants.....	21
Interview Procedure.....	22
Interview Protocol.....	23
Data Analysis.....	23
IV. RESULTS.....	25
Research Question One.....	25
Research Question Two.....	27
Research Question Three.....	36
Research Question Four.....	42

Summary of Findings.....	48
V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	51
Significance of Results.....	51
Conclusions Drawn from the Present Study.....	58
Recommendations.....	59
REFERENCES.....	61
APPENDIXES.....	65
Informed Consent Form.....	67
Interview Guide Protocol.....	69
Information Letter.....	71

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

**“Bigger, are there many Negro boys like you?”
“I reckon so. All of ‘em I know ain’t got nothing and ain’t going nowhere.”**

Richard Wright, *Native Son*, 1940

When Black students attend a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) they are thrown into a world where they may be expected to fail, or they hear whispers that they are only in school because of ‘Affirmative Action’ or a special minority scholarship. Black students face many challenges academically and socially, and the challenges are greater if they attend a predominantly White institution. There are also the stereotypes that Blacks will not succeed unless they undergo some form of supplemental or remedial education. With these society imposed expectations, Black students have almost all the odds against them.

Even heavier burdens are the many stereotypes of Black males in general. Many of these stereotypes tell Black men that no matter how hard they try, they will amount to nothing in the eyes of most Americans. The above quote from Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, written in 1940, unfortunately still represents the attitudes and perceptions of many Black and White Americans today.

As a Black woman, I have noticed several issues in regard to my Black male counterparts. Many of the Black men I have known or dated outside college walls have been gang members or have dropped out of school, but at some point in their lives, get back on track. It seems to me that there had to be a major dramatic change in their lives that shocked them enough to motivate themselves to take ownership of their own destiny.

In college, I had a different exposure to Black men. There were several in my freshman class. I always had a Big Brother figure when I needed one, but as time went on, I noticed that my big brothers were not the positive role models I imagined. Some of the conversations I remember most were about sex and parties. One big brother that I looked up to was the President of the Black Student Association when I was the Vice President. As President, he did not fulfill his duties, and this dereliction was a great disappointment to me.

Common occurrences among the Black students at the small, predominantly White institution I attended were that Black men either left school voluntarily or were asked to leave because of their grades or social indiscretions. By the time I entered my junior year of college, there was only one Black male remaining in our class. By our senior year, he too was asked to leave because of his grades. This loss was very devastating. All of the Black men in my life were beginning to look like failures. I placed the blame on my brothers for not applying themselves, and I was mad at my Black male peers for not sticking it through. When I came to graduate school and began to research African American retention, I stopped blaming Black men for their failure so blindly. My research revealed that there were a number of factors that contributed to their inability to be successful.

For example, Gibbs (1988) stated,

In the mass media Black males are portrayed in a limited number of roles, most of them deviant, dangerous, and dysfunctional. This constant barrage of predominantly disturbing images inevitably contributes to the public's negative stereotypes of Black men, particularly those who are perceived as young, hostile,

and impulsive. Clearly, the message says: If they entertain you, enjoy them (at a safe distance); if they serve you, patronize them (and don't forget to leave a tip); if they threaten you, avoid them (and don't ride the subway). Thus, young Black males are stereotyped by the five "d's": dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed. There is no room in this picture for comprehension, caring or compassion for the plight of these young Black men (p.3).

Society has unlimited stereotypes and expectations about and for Black men. Black men, for example, are often seen as physically strong yet intellectually dumb. I am guilty of buying into these stereotypes and I suspect that Black men themselves fall prey to these harsh societal views. I also suspect that most, if not all, Black men are aware of these stereotypes.

The purpose of the present study was to find out how these and other ill conceived stereotypes ingrained in the American psyche, affect Black men, and what might facilitate more Black men to be retained to graduation from predominantly and historically White institutions of higher education. Specifically, the study focused on the main question: What factors contribute to the success of Black men in college? This question was an integral component under investigation. Perhaps answers, or insights into these questions, can be used by higher education practitioners and researchers to develop successful techniques to encourage and support Black men through college. These findings can be helpful not only in motivating Black men to enroll and persist in college to graduation, but they can also be useful to elementary and secondary school teachers in their efforts to understand and help nurture a more confident and successful Black male student who is prepared to enter college.

Research Questions

1. What impact do parental or familial relationships have in the lives of Black male college students?
2. How do stereotypes and societal perceptions of Black males' factor into the daily lives of Black male students at a predominantly White institution?
3. What effect can the atmosphere of a predominantly White institution have on the lives of Black male students?
4. How does a Black male student's perception of himself affect his ability to succeed on a predominantly White campus?

Significance of the Study

Successful Black men in college are phenomena. Research shows that Black men comprise one of the lowest population groups in American colleges and universities. "Many researchers contend that African American males have a distinct challenge in persisting through their college education due to prior socialization, lower levels of teacher expectation, and unsupportive and unwelcoming campus climates" (Edwards, 2003). The environments on college campuses, a Black male's upbringing, and the way Black men are viewed in society are only some of the factors that affect the success of Black men and their graduation rates at colleges and universities. In order to help Black men understand and reach their potential, it is important to start with the Black men who have "made it." By studying a sample of successful Black college men, information can be gathered that might help other Black men realize their potential. Not only is this information important for colleges and universities, it is essential to pass this data on to high school and elementary professionals.

The belief that Black males are a problem begins as early as first grade. Stereotypes and unflattering subliminal messages build throughout their schooling and, unfortunately by the third grade, many young Black men begin to internalize them. Subsequently, their ability to enter higher education and succeed is adversely impacted (Edwards, 2003). Research regarding the stereotyping and the downward spiral of Black men in higher education is compelling. Once data for the present study are collected and their meaning understood, educators at all levels (colleges and universities) will have more information to aid in truly understanding Black men and helping Black men understand themselves.

Limitations of the Study

The present study was a qualitative analysis of data collected on the personal experiences and opinions of five successful Black college men. The authenticity of the study depended on how much the participants were willing to share regarding their experiences as Black men on a predominantly White campus. This project was also subject to the researcher's own sensitivities, race, ethnicity and gender. Since the researcher is a Black woman, the difference in gender between researcher and participants may have affected participant responses. Similarly, being Black may have affected the participants' comfort level, willingness to share or withhold information, and expression of assumed common cultural experiences.

These are the voices of five Black men and their experiences on one predominantly White university campus. The results of this study should not be interpreted as all-encompassing for Black men who attend college at other predominantly

White institutions, or necessarily at the predominantly White institution that serves as a setting for the present study.

Definitions

Predominantly White Institution (PWI)- an institution of higher education in which 80 percent or more of the total student population is of European ancestry. African Americans and all other recognized racial and ethnic groups comprise the remaining percentage of the student population.

Successful Black Male - Black male students who have maintained continuous enrollment in one institution since their freshman year and have completed all degree requirements for graduate from that institution.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter contains a review of literature regarding the Black male experience in college and university environments. Focus was placed on four areas that could contribute to motivation or discouragement of success for Black men: 1) parental influence; 2) societal influence and stereotypes; 3) institutional environment, and 4) perception of self.

Literature Review

Even the most common elements of everyday life represent a daily struggle for Black males in American society. There are many factors that must be considered in the experience of Black men in general, and of Black males as college students in particular, such as issues of masculinity and gender dominance over women and male dominance in society. When skin color is added, these experiences are made even more difficult. Black men have to develop their identity within the limitations of minority status. In a culture where men are supposed to be dominant, the Black man is usually denied this privilege simply because of his skin color.

As Black men go through their schooling they deal with teachers and a curriculum that do not support their development. According to Young (in Ballard, 2002, p. 12), "Black males have been substantially discouraged from pursuing higher education due to negative experiences in elementary and high schools. These males may not necessarily recognize the connection between education and increased economic opportunity." Ballard goes on to reveal that Black males are not supported by their high school counselors in their pursuit of college unless they are stellar students (Ballard, 2002). The

discouragement of Black males starts early in their academic career. Whether in the real world or the classroom setting, it appears that Black men are subjected to different treatment because of stereotypes within the larger society. Black men are supposed to be dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed. According to Young (in Ballard, 2002, p. 13), "many Black males have incorporated some of the many negative racist perceptions of themselves that proclaim that Black males cannot succeed in college." Perhaps this unflattering assumption is the reason why there are not a lot of successful Black men on most campuses.

The low numbers of Black students, more specifically Black men, in college was not always the case. Black males were the first to enroll in historically White institutions in record numbers during the 1960's. Most were recruited as scholarship athletes (Wallace 1993). According to the African-American Education Data book (in Edwards, 2003) "there was a 21 percent increase from 1970 to 1997 in undergraduate enrollment of African-American men, and a 68 percent increase in the undergraduate African-American women for that same time period."

"Enrollment patterns fluctuated over the years and by 1976, Black women outnumbered Black men among college enrollers. Because male enrollment had dropped considerably by 1980, while the female enrollment had risen quite noticeably, Black women comprised a larger share of the Black college enrollers in 1980 (58 percent) than in 1976 (54 percent) (Fennema & Ayers, 1984). In 1980 Black females made up 5.3 percent of the total enrollment in higher education: that same year, Black males accounted for only 3.8 percent of the total (Wallace, 1993).

Even though there has been an increase in the enrollment of African American men in higher education there remains a noticeable gap between the enrollments of Black men and Black women in American colleges and universities.

More recent figures show that in 2000 Black women in college outnumbered Black men 1,095,000 to 635,300 (African American Enrollment Trends at Joliet Junior College, www.jjc.cc.il.us/Admin/ie/February2004.pdf). Between 1997 and 2000 (Roach, 2001, p. 18), the percentage of Black men compared to Black women enrolled in college has dropped from 37.4 percent to 36.7 percent. The problem of retention is not as overwhelming a problem with Black women as it is with Black men. Currently, Black women have a stronger presence in America's colleges and universities than their male counterparts.

Of the Black men that are enrolled in college, few have positive experiences to share if they are enrolled in a predominantly White institution. Davis (1999) reported that many Black males shared that their experiences with faculty and peers have been negative. These negative reactions result in Black men avoiding peers and faculty members outside of the classroom at predominantly White institutions. The lack of interaction can affect their academic performance and ability to create healthy social circles. Subsequently, the atmosphere becomes one that is hostile and uncomfortable for the Black male at predominantly White institutions.

"Enrollment data for the 1980's showed that four of every five minority students were enrolled at predominantly White colleges and universities" (Wallace, 1993). Unfortunately, the ever increasing minority population on college campuses, was and continues to be met with resistance and racial incidents.

Wallace (1993) stated that the enrollment of larger numbers of Black students should have prompted historically and predominantly White institutions to improve their ability to better meet the needs of the growing minority population. Minority students had unique issues that institutions were not addressing. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), said that "the academic, social, and psychological worlds inhabited by most non-White students on predominantly White campuses are substantially different in almost every respect from those of their White peers." Sadly, as the nation celebrates the 50th year of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, KS*, 1954, 1955, historically and predominantly White colleges and universities, as well as special interest groups (*Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action and Integration and Fight for Equality By Any Means Necessary v. State Board of Canvassers*, No. 254652 (Mich. App. 2004)), continue to bypass the needs of minority student populations.

Where are the Black men if not on campus? Scholars, who explored the data on African Americans, pointed to the high incidence of Black males entering the military; the availability of employment after high school; and the disproportionately higher levels of incarceration among young Black men (Roach, 2001). A recent study prepared by the Washington-based Justice Policy Institute, found that in 2000 there were 791,600 Black men behind bars and 603,032 enrolled in colleges and universities. But this was not always the case. Twenty years earlier, there were three times as many Black men enrolled in higher education (463,700) as there were in prisons and jails (143,000) (Love, 2002). While the research confirms where Black men were instead of college, it is possible that the information regarding incarceration could be attributed to the lack of positive role models for these men, or quite simply, the negative portrayals of Black men in the media

as an exaggeration or societal aberration. Alternatively, many researchers contribute current incarceration figures as evidence of the biological inferiority of Black men in general (Edwards, 1984).

Parental Influence

“Being an African American parent can be complicated simply by the differences in cultural values and traditions that are often contradictory to the contemporary European-American, middle-class culture and value system” (Lee, 1996, p. 105). Growing up in a Black household, Black men are obviously learning different lessons than those of their White counterparts. Their upbringing will also vary based on how many parents (and which ones) are in the home. It is important for Black men to have positive male role models in their lives, and if they grow up in a household with a single-mother as a parent they may lack positive male role models which can be problematic. According to Lee (1996, p. 128), “mothers of Black men usually do a great job of being both mother and father (with the help of other males in the family such as uncles, cousins, grandfathers, etcetera), but the task can be overwhelming as they attempt to raise their sons against the terrible backdrop of ever-increasing societal pressure on Black males”.

Another challenge arises if the parents have not attended a college or university. Parents may become frustrated and hesitate when promoting college, or fail to take an active role in the college search with their sons. Some Black parents feel that the PWI's are often out to take advantage of their children. There is a collective “they,” at White institutions that holds Black parents back from finding out information about the institution (Smith, 2001). The “collective they” parents identify as consisting of high school counselors, college administrators, and college admission and outreach personnel.

There is no trust between the collective "they" and the low-income parents of African American students. This distrust is a parental issue, but these insecurities can trickle into the mindsets of their children. Parents must fully recognize the influence they have on their children and how powerful their influence can be on the selection process.

Although societal pressures may get the best of Black males at times, Constantine and Blackmon (2002) affirmed that "home and peer milieus that support the development of Black American youths may equip them to face a sometimes unfriendly and hostile world outside of these safe havens" (p. 330). If a Black male has a strong support network then it is quite possible that he will go farther, and become involved in college socially and academically, or at least be ready to face the world. According to Lee (1996), parents who can promote the attitudes, values and behaviors necessary for academic and social success can help empower their Black male children. This empowerment must begin in the home. Parents must be good role models for their sons and they must also be ready to prepare their children for American society and entry into institutions of higher learning.

Societal Influence and Stereotypes

"The Western scientist Lomardo (in Hall, 2001) referred to two distinct stereotypes that connoted African American men. The first is brute. The second is Sambo. Both were initially developed by Europeans to secure their position in Western society and simultaneously denigrate Africans for purposes of subordination" (p.106).

Black men are still seen as strong, yet savage and threatening, as denoted by the term "brute." The term "sambo" connotes dumbness or unintelligence. Black men are usually

stereotyped as being exceptionally talented in sports. "The stereotype of the 'dumb Black' rationalizes the ability of African American men to run faster and longer and to jump higher than their European American counterparts as attributed to anatomy or genes" (Hall, 2001, p. 109). While this may be a rationale of racists, larger society usually refers to all athletes as "dumb jocks."

It is all but an accepted truism that,

If Black men are not playing sports, then they are in jail. "Incarceration does play a role. Popular culture is playing a role. Some of the people young Black men look up to are not sending the message that college is the thing to do" (Lomax, in Roach, 2001, p. 19).

In the media the messages are that Black men are thugs or they want money and lots of women. There are very few movies that portray a Black man in college. Two films that come to mind are *Boys N' da Hood* and *Set it Off*, and the men in these movies who are aspiring to go to college both get shot and killed. Both movies were very popular in the 1990s, but it is unfortunate that even in movies when a young Black man tries to 'make it,' his dreams are shattered. The image of Black men in printed media, radio, and television also send the same message. These images are discouraging and young people fall prey to these social images. According to Fields (2001, p.15), "Everybody thinks the young Black generation isn't going anywhere." The image of young Black men never fulfilling their goals and desires is evident in the their portrayal in the media.

It seems as though the societal ideal is for Black men to become more like their White middle class counterparts. When Black men go to college they are compared to

caucasian campuses" (James, 1998, p. 228). The social climate and intellectual atmosphere at colleges and universities is very important to the development of Black students. Most Black students simply need to see people who look like them, especially those who attend predominantly White institutions. According to Gurin and Epps (1975, p. 141), "many Black students will still prefer to attend colleges where the campus ambience supports their personal development without the level of conflict and isolation experienced on predominantly White campuses." This still holds true because all students, regardless of ethnic background, want to feel that they belong. However, in the development of the Black student, feelings of appreciation and acceptance, alienation and hostility are more important because the larger society does not support their successes. Attitudes of non-support should be absent in institutions of higher learning, but they are present in abundance on predominantly White campuses.

Another factor that concerns Black students is the "lack of diversity among staff, the limited social activities, and academic organizations at predominantly White universities. This can affect their academic focus and their ability to succeed" (James, 1998). Not only is it important to see peers with the same cultural background it is also important to have professors who have the same background. All too often, a White student will have a professor who shares a similar cultural background, usually one of dominance and privilege due to race or gender.

In gender comparisons of Black males and Black females, Cuyjet (in Roach, 2001, p. 19) said that women were more collaborative and thus more likely to get help from others. Men were conditioned to go it alone as rugged individualism has inherent value and status. This conditioning is a problem because Black men do not ask for help

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when they really need support. Institutions have to find a way to help Black men feel more comfortable in seeking assistance and support. To establish this level of comfort, maybe as simple as providing mentors or hiring more Black men in faculty, staff and administrative positions. By introducing students to successful people of color, or simply positive Black male role models, their interactions might reinforce student self-confidence, and young Black males can realize the benefits of high educational and occupational achievement (Gurin & Epps, 1975, p. 141). Also, it is important to not only introduce Black students to successful Black educators and leaders, it is important to support their expressions of self-worth. Sutton and Terrell (1997) agreed that getting Black men involved in the community and in the campus environment can help them realize that the entire campus community embraces their "leadership contributions and values". In addition to Black students getting involved in campus activities and registered student organizations, the campus community must also foster their intellectual and social development (Wagener & Nettles, 1998).

Perception of Self

For African-American students, absent from many of their educational experiences are the voices and images of African-Americans past and present that are integral to any story about the United States, its culture, and its people. Also absent are opportunities for Black students (men especially) to know and understand the world on their own terms (Price, 1999). Black students notably do not learn about themselves in a predominantly White classroom setting. Therefore, it is quite likely that their development as Black persons may be extremely difficult and at a slower pace if they are at a predominantly White institution and have little to no experience with racism. Taylor

(1986) "conducted studies of African-American college students on predominantly White campuses and stated that the majority of African-American students who wished to be accepted by their White counterparts did not have a clear understanding of themselves" (as cited in James, 1998, p. 229). Thus it is quite possible that these students have not experienced racism, or were not exposed to negative social views during their upbringing and It is also possible that these Black students simply did not want to socialize with Black people at that point in their development.

"Cross (1973) stated that African Americans could progress in a linear sequential fashion through four distinctive stages of Black consciousness. Cross's four stages of Black consciousness are, in progressive order, pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, and internalization. Each of these stages is prescribed as an individual's perceptions, feelings, and attitudes toward other African Americans, toward Whites, and toward themselves" (Okech & Harrington, 2002, p. 214).

Concomitantly, the theory of psychological Nigressence, as put forth by Cross, also provides a template for conceptualizing. While not all Black people go through all stages, Cross' Black identity development model helps educators at institutions understand what a Black male student could possibly be experiencing. The way that a Black man feels about himself will influence his success or non-success as a student. Mitchell and Dell (as cited in Sutton & Terrell, 1997, p. 56) found that as students became more comfortable with their racial identity, they were more likely to display interest and openness in both cultural and non-cultural activities. Perhaps, as Black male students get older and progress through college, they will also progress through the stages and develop self-confidence with who they are as men and as Black men in the larger society.

So, not only can Black men increase their Black awareness and appreciation of others, they might become get more involved in their collegiate experience and persist to graduation.

Summary of Literature

The literature reviewed for the present study encompasses familial influences, stereotypes, institutional environment and self-perception and how these areas affect the success of Black male college students. The literature highlighted various conceptions and misconceptions about Black men and their abilities to succeed and function in society at large. The importance of family, the impact of ill conceived stereotypes, institutional environments, and self perceptions were all made abundantly relevant in research on the success of Black males on PWI campuses.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and consider the influences and the perceptions that affect the success of Black men in college. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to find out how stereotypes affect Black men and what may assist more Black men to be retained and graduated from institutions of higher education. The participants for this study were college seniors selected from the Black male population at a mid-size PWI located in the Midwest. Four research questions were formulated to guide the direction of the study.

1. What impact do parental or familial relationships have in the lives of Black male college students?
2. How do stereotypes and societal perceptions of Black males' factor into the daily lives of Black male students at a predominantly White institution?
3. What effect can the atmosphere of a predominantly White institution have on the lives of Black male students?
4. How does a Black male student's perception of himself affect his ability to succeed on a predominantly White campus?

Qualitative Design

This qualitative life history study (Karen, 1993) was conducted with five students attending a Predominantly White University in the Midwest. These students were asked to volunteer their time to participate in a one-on-one conversational interview to discuss their experiences as a Black male in the college setting. The focus of the study centered

on the personal experiences and impressions of collegiate events of these five successful Black male college seniors. The data sought to address the research questions did not lend themselves to quantitative analysis, but to individual nuances of experience that are transparent to quantitative data. Thus, a qualitative life history method research design was employed (Karen, 1993). Researcher "insight and intuition, combined with careful examination of the data, are necessary for recognition of patterns and themes" (para. 2) emerging from the personal interviews. The idea is to "move the research from description to interpretation and theory (para. 6)."

After the purpose of the research was explained to each participant, and each signed an informed consent statement (Appendix A), the interview protocol (Appendix B) was used in the same manner with each research participant.

Setting

The university selected as the setting for the present study had a high population of undergraduate students with most of the students living on campus. The majority of the student population comes from the Midwest, with the remaining students from 39 states and 45 nations. The campus environment was regarded as one of the safest in the nation. African-American students comprised, 6.1 percent of the total student population during the most recent academic year.

The campus was located in a rural county-seat community with a population, including university students, of nearly 30,000 people. The nearest large central cities with meaningful Black populations were at least 100 miles away, so the availability of many goods and services catering to African-Americans were limited at best. Few local

citizens were persons of color, and there was a question about how well accepted Black students were in the wider community.

Participants

Five Black men from different majors and family backgrounds comprised the sample population of the study. The sample students were seniors who attended the same university for all four years.

At many PWI institutions, I believe there are two types of Black males. First are the involved Black males who are academically motivated, participate in student government, a sport or some type of extracurricular activity. Second are the Black males who are not involved in extracurricular activities, and may or may not be academically motivated. By selecting three men who were involved in campus activities, and two men who were not heavily involved, various success and involvement levels can be examined.

Three of the students were heavily involved in extra-curricular activities, while two had limited involvement in on-campus activities. I studied these two types of students to evaluate their motivation to stay in the college setting, and also to identify anything specific that the institution was doing to keep them enrolled.

I wanted to study this select group because it is pertinent in comparing my observations from the interviews with the research literature. Having students with diverse college involvement will provide insight into their experiences as Black men in college at many different levels. According to Schwartz and Washington (2002),

“the best overall model to predict retention among African American students is one that considers the campus environment and includes, in order of importance, first semester grades, non-cognitive variables, e.g., social integration, academic

integration, commitment to college, faculty-student interactions, and several demographic variables" (p. 355). This study touched on these different factors and how they affect Black male undergraduate students.

Because the setting for this present study was a PWI, finding five Black senior males who have been at the particular institution for all four years proved to be challenging. I contacted the Office of Admissions, the Honors College, the Football Coach, and the Office of Minority Affairs in order to find the five men who participated in this study. I also employed snowball sampling (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) and contacted Black students on campus to help me find Black men. Using students to find the men was the most effective method.

Due to the limited nature of the selection pool, steps were taken to be very diligent in maintaining confidentiality and the identity of the participants. The participants came from two parent and single parent homes. Four of the five participants grew up in large cities. One of the participants grew up on U.S. military bases, thus resulting in his family relocating several times during his childhood.

Interview Procedure

Being a woman interviewing men was a reality that had to be acknowledged, so choosing a comfortable yet professional environment was important. Four of the five participants met with me in my campus graduate assistantship office. The office setting was professional but at the same time it was inviting to students. The fifth participant and I met in his on-campus job office. The two settings were areas where confidentiality was maintained and distractions were very limited.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol consisted of sixteen open-ended questions. By using open-ended questions the participants were able to have a conversation with the researcher. The researcher was then able to probe for more information based on the participants' responses. The interview questions were modeled after the research of Watson, L., Terrell, M., Wright, D., and Associates. (2002). Their study on how minorities experience college provided key background information and a starting point for the present study.

Data Analysis

I took detailed notes during the conversational interview process as well as taperecorded the interviews. I then transcribed the audiotapes from each interview in order to accurately report what the participants shared. After interview tapes were transcribed, each participant had the opportunity to member-check his interview. After each research participant approved interviews as authentic, data were analyzed using the constant-comparative method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) to identify emerging categories and themes. Transcripts of each interview were compared to the notes taken during each interview as a means of confirmation. Regular meetings with the thesis advisor and other committee members helped to assure the quality of the thick description used in the findings and interpretation of the interview data.

The compiled information was then compared to the research questions, with the information then sorted based on the research questions and common themes (Karen, 1993). The interview questions can be found in Appendix B. The findings from the

interviews can be found in Chapter IV, with interpretation, conclusions and recommendations in Chapter V.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter is a presentation of the undergraduate collegiate experiences of five Black male students. Each of these men had a different story to tell when explaining why they have been successful during their undergraduate career at a Predominantly White Institution. Four research questions were utilized to reveal any factors that may lead to Black male success at one predominantly White Institution located in the Midwest.

These research questions were:

1. What impact do parental or familial relationships have in the lives of Black male college students?
2. How do stereotypes and societal perceptions of Black males' factor into the daily lives of Black male students at a predominantly White institution?
3. What effect can the atmosphere of a predominantly White institution have on the lives of Black male students?
4. How does a Black male student's perception of himself affect his ability to succeed on a predominantly White campus?

Throughout interviewing and the analysis of the findings, themes and factors emerged that may hold the key to helping Black men have a successful and rewarding collegiate experience.

Research Question One: What impact do parental or familial relationships have in the lives of Black male college students?

Three of the five participants in this study came from two-parent homes. These participants revealed that immediate as well as distant relatives definitely factored into

their successful college career. There were many similarities in the participants' answers to the interview questions. The similarities included that while their family was a source of great support, the neighborhood and the environment where their family lived were not welcoming places; the participants often talked to their family members on the phone, and went home only on rare occasions. One of the participants said that there was always "a lot of stuff going on at home." He also shared that when he goes back home he realizes that he is perceived to be different from the average educated Black person in his community.

When you go back home you're different. You're not used to being around people who only graduated from high school. It's weird sometimes.

One participant shared that sometimes all of the problems at home stressed him out at school.

When things are going bad at home, it affects how you do at school, you know? If you have financial problems at home, or family problems, or if your sister is not doing well at school then it can get really, really bad at the house. I think that can kind of be a problem if you don't know how to just sort things out with your family. It puts stress on you, you have to work more, or study harder or stay up later. It puts a lot on you and it makes life a lot more complicated.

Another participant talked about being a role model for his sibling, an expectation set by his family. He also added that his family definitely factored into his experience giving him lots of support.

My friends from home don't really factor in, but my family definitely factors in. I am the oldest child and I am a role model for my brother. They gave me lots of support and they have expectations of me.

Research Question Two: How do stereotypes and societal perceptions of Black males' factor into the daily lives of Black male students at a predominantly White institution?

The interview data on stereotypes and societal influences were extremely revealing because the participants were asked about their upbringing, and how stereotypes about Black men affected them. Three of the participants were from low income to middle class backgrounds. Two of the participants came from middle to upper class homes. For some participants their neighborhood was not the best, as illustrated by one participant who described the city and neighborhood where he grew up.

Well, the neighborhood I live in is in a part of the city in an area like the ghetto, like 99.9% Black. You know, pothole streets, ragged houses, not very good education system, very intelligent people in the school, good teachers, but it's just like, if you want to let them see that you're smart and have potential, you've got to go to the way side (a term meaning you have to leave one's neighborhood to excel)...it's not a very positive environment. Overall, there are a lot of poverty people there.

This participant did not grow up in the best conditions but he knew that if he wanted to be successful or be something in life, he had to work hard for it.

The similarity between this participant and another was worthy of note. They both grew up in similar neighborhoods and revealed that for them growing up was not a matter of

having what you wanted, it was getting what you needed. The next quote fully captured his point.

I'd say, growing up, we were lower middle class. It was a predominantly all Black neighborhood. Basically, we just had what we needed. Parents had a single family home. Had to work 16 hours, you know, two jobs. Just to get food and clothes.

Only one participant shared that he grew up well off and had everything he wanted. He was pretty confident in stating that he had a privileged childhood where his family was one of the few Black families in the neighborhood. It is important to add that this participant grew up on US Military bases.

After a description of the neighborhood where these men grew up, it was important to find out about the other Black men who lived in their neighborhood. The answers varied amongst participants. Two of the participants mentioned drugs, gangs, cemeteries, or jail, as circumstances in which you could find some of their childhood friends.

One of the above participants shared,

Most of my friends I grew up with are not where they want to be right now.

Some are in jail, deceased or struggling at their parents' or grandparents' house.

The rest are taking junior college courses or are in the armed forces.

One of the two participants asserted that a few of his friends did take the college path. He is still friends with them but he does not hang with them as much because of their reputations they all share. One of the participants shared that he did not have anything in common with the other Black men in his neighborhood. His family was different, he had

both parents, and his family had a car. This was not the norm in his neighborhood. He ended his answer saying that he did not have 'any boys', he was alone. He went on to speak of the way one of his successful Black male college friends is viewed by the other Black men in his neighborhood.

You got friends, your close friends, and I have friends that I am cool with. Like we'll always stay in touch. But I don't have the boys back at home. This guy I know, he'll call them and they're like, "Well, he is away at school getting an education, and they're all hanging out on the streets, and it's like he come back and try to hang out and he like I don't do that, you know?" They call him a sell-out, but it's not that, he just learned something different about what it is.

His answer revealed that he is viewed as a sellout, trying to be White because he went off to college and he is not on the street like the other men. This participant liked being independent. He did not seem to mind being different from the other people in his neighborhood.

I loved being by myself. It's like, I feel like sometimes when you're around other people so much they try to dictate who you are. And I feel like, it's okay for me to be around people, but I also need my own time. I am going to be influenced if I am around certain strong individuals, and their opinions and thoughts can rub off on me, and they cause me to go a way that is unnecessary.

This participant chose independence over peer pressure. He acknowledged that it was safer to be on his own than to be around people who could have a negative influence on him.

The participant who grew up in a neighborhood with a smaller Black community described his Black friends as very different from himself. The friends he made were through church.

My childhood friends they were mostly Christian. Most of the Black friends I made at church were sex obsessed, and wanna-be thugs. My Black friends liked Rhythm and Blues, and Rap. I didn't listen to that type of music.

As he talked, it became apparent that although he currently had a relationship with the people from his childhood, he definitely stood out from the other participants with his experience.

In general, the participants chose a different path from the majority of Black males in their neighborhood. One of the participants referred to the Black males in their neighborhood as "not knowing what direction they were headed." Four of the five participants were from geographic areas where success and college were a rarity. The connection between the participants' environment and whether or not people were successful was interesting and had to it posed. Where would these participants be if they were not in college? One of the participants said that he did not have a choice about going to college.

He shared,

I don't know where I would be if I was not in college. There was never any question and I didn't have any choice about whether or not I would go to college.

For me, the military was not an option.

Another participant simply stated that he had no idea where he would be if he were not in college. One participant said rather confidently that he would be in Hollywood

somewhere on a magazine cover. Two participants said they would be working back home. One of the participants stated,

I would probably be miserable back home working a job somewhere and living with my mom. I wouldn't be prepared enough to hold down the responsibilities of living on my own. That's where being in college benefits me, because I do have that real world experience that I can pick up.

For all of the five participants it became clear that college was the only choice that they had, and all seemed to be secure and safe in their decision.

These Black students survived the societal influences of their neighborhood, but also held views about Black men in other places. The participants were asked about the stereotypes they have heard about Black men, and if those stereotypes have affected them. Overall, the participants did not know where to start when it came to listing the different stereotypes about Black men. A lot of the stereotypes overlapped. Most of the men mentioned laziness or Hip Hop and gold chains. Each of the men was affected in a different way. Whether affected positively or negatively, they had something to share.

One participant rattled off a list of stereotypes such as Black men are lazy, aggressive, well-endowed, unintelligent and natural thieves. He admitted that the stereotypes affected him but in an unusual way. He believed that he did not fit the stereotypic Black man profile. He has been told that he does not act like a Black person, that he talks White, and that he is not Black enough. Another participant listed lazy in his list of stereotypes, and he also added intimidating, hip hop, and always looking for handouts. He stated that these stereotypes categorized the whole group. He seemed

angry as he went on to say that he has to go out everyday and prove the stereotypes wrong. As he said,

I think that's probably the main way it affects me. You know, because it's like, you always have to wonder. Okay, if you go looking for a job, are they hiring me because I'm qualified or are they hiring me because they want to meet their quota? You know, you always have that doubt because that's the way things are. As far as stereotypes, you always have to prove them wrong, you know. So that's the way I guess you have to go about it.

While the stereotypes about Black men seem to affect those two participants in a negative way, they seemed to use the stereotypes to empower them, or as a way to prove people wrong.

Basically, what's going on is it's just, they're taking experiences from different individuals and categorizing the whole group. I mean, it may apply to some, but it doesn't necessarily apply to all. And that's the stereotype that we have. We have to go out and prove society wrong everyday, especially when you meet somebody new, for the first time.

One of the participants separated his answer into what White men think of Black men and what White women think of Black men. He commented that White men think of Black men as superior in the physical sense but inferior mentally. His example of the way that a White male thinks is that "a Black man can't get high, get drunk and write a five-page paper the next day." His message was that it is impossible for a Black man to think under any circumstances. Then he described the relationship between a White woman and a Black male. White women are intrigued by a Black man's physical features but also

intimidated by their stereotypical aggression. One of the statements that stood out in his response follows.

I'm a cool person to be around, to talk to, to look at, to dance with, to party with, but when it comes to something serious or something confrontational, I don't want to be around him because he's Black. The perception of the townies is that, they think Black people shouldn't be here. I mean, there have been times when I have walked in Wal-Mart here and they just give you that look which seems to say, "Don't you know you're Black!" You get that crazy look that says you're not accepted here, they might accept you in the schools, but not here."

This participant's response hinted at the possibility that the reaction of the town's citizens toward Black students may come from stereotypes about Black men.

Unfortunately, there were too many stereotypes about Black men to list, but one participant made it clear that every group has stereotypes. He said,

There's a lot of stereotypes, but I believe they exist in every race. In every culture you're gonna' have your lazy people that are Caucasian that are Latino that are Asian, you know...you're gonna' have your lazy people that are Black. I'm not saying the stereotypes of laziness is not true, but you know, we've got some lazy people. (Laughter) You know that's Black people; some of them are real lazy.

You know what I'm saying? But not all of them are, you know what I'm saying? He also mentioned the hip hop image of the Black male as portrayed in the media. The message conveyed by this participant is that the *bling-bling*, the gold, and the money make Black people appear to be materialistic.

Black is having gold, Black is having this, this is what Black is. And the thing about the Black man is the gold teeth and G-unit chain, and the twenty-two rims. It's like there's nothing to us but the superficial, just materialism. Take away the materialistic, take away the millions of dollars and there's still nothing to us. It's like, even with money, we're just a higher class of ghetto, and that's not true. But I think that image is incorporated in the media a lot.

The print and visual media are places where stereotypes about Black people are found and formed. The participants were asked about music and movies and if they have affected the way they see themselves as Black men. Their answers were overwhelmingly similar. All of the participants were affected by the negative portrayals of Black men in the media, and they wanted to be seen as individuals. One participant mentioned that he was often compared to Black people on TV or other Black men on campus. He shared some of the phrases he was accustomed to hearing.

You don't act like a Black person. You talk White. You're not Black enough.

The overall consensus was that the images on television or in movies were sometimes not representative of their experiences. They reflected that today, there are more movies with Black people who are successful middle class families but there is still a long way to go in the portrayal of Black men on television.

I mean, the first change was when the *Cosby Show* came out. But, I mean, typically you still see sitcoms with a predominantly White cast with one Black actor. There are some changes you know, but they could still be improved.

There was mention of the Hollywood Black man, and the participants did not want to be seen as the Hollywood Black man. The Hollywood Black man was the

product of the twisted minds of Hollywood moguls and how they see a Black man as a commodity to be exploited and used for their personal gain.

I think the media gives the vision of how society views the Black man, and I think that by having that vision, that lets me know that I am as far from that vision as possible. I don't want somebody to think that I'm that way. I know I'm Black, I let people know that's not the only way I'm living my life. In my life I'm in roles that contradict what the media says.

One participant was pretty nonchalant and said that people can either agree or disagree with this image. Another participant said that people expected him to be like the people on television. This participant was angry as he expressed his sincere request to be seen as an individual and not as a character on television.

Other people expect me to act like the people they see in the movies or on TV. It annoys the hell out of me, the characters and shit. I'm forever being compared in looks to some famous actor, rapper or athlete. When I'm introduced to people I don't want their expectations to be of some made up character.

Another participant named one movie that really spoke to him. The movie *Cadence* was a favorite for him because the characters are all Black men, with the exception of one White man. For him this movie plot emphasized the importance of getting to know people as individuals. He ended by saying that once you learn people individuals, you realize that all Blacks are not "Ghetto," and they do not all speak Ebonics.

Research Question Three: What effect can the atmosphere of a predominantly White institution have on the lives of Black male students?

When asked about their level of contentment with the climate and environment at the university as a whole on a scale of 1 to 4, four of the five participants stated "3". The participants stated that they liked the institution because the staff and students were friendly and they felt they could get along with them. One participant revealed that he chose this university because his cousin attended. He received a scholarship and was also knew about the city before he became a student.

The remaining participant rated his contentment level as 2.8. He went on to say: I am very satisfied with this University and the friends that I have made. The reason I gave it a 2.8 instead of a 4, or instead of a 3, is because I mean I wanted to go to a warmer climate. So it's in the Midwest, but also because I feel that this University pushes you to get a degree and doesn't push you to learn. I give it a lower rating. I feel like I should be pushed to learn more instead of being geared toward getting out and getting a job right away.

This participant wanted to attend an institution where he felt he would be learning while also earning a degree. He did "not want to be a part of a machine-like operation, where people with degrees are just cranked out each semester." His impression of instruction on the campus was that faculty taught to get students through the courses, and not really to learn the content.

The next question for the participants focused on whether or not they made any connections with counselors, friends, or associates. All of the men felt they made a connection. One participant shared that he has had the same friends since his freshman

year. Another revealed that when he first started school it was all social interactions but as time went by he was no longer seen as “the one Black friend” or “that cute guy.” He also talked about the relationships that he has built with five other Black male students. These relationships seemed to be an extremely important part of this participant’s life, as he felt the five were so close with each other that when it came time to have children, he would be regarded as an uncle. He sees himself being involved in each of his friends’ lives after college. Another participant mentioned his friendships and lifelong connections by stating,

Yes, I feel that I made a connection with people at Eastern, because it’s such a small community of people. And, it’s like you get to interact with a lot of the same people in classes. I’ve changed majors three times. So it’s like in my Business major, going to church, and getting involved in organizations. I’ve made a lot of connections with people and different college connections. People I think I’m always going to be friends with for life, you know?

The oldest participant in this study shared that people asked him for advice. He stated that,

I am satisfied by helping people. People see me as a role model even though I don’t view myself that way.

This participant’s insight was interesting because it showed a maturity level and a certain degree of self-satisfaction. He wanted to give back and make a difference. His response revealed that because he felt needed on campus he felt he made a connection.

Participants were asked about specific ways that the institution, faculty, and other students demonstrated an appreciation of their racial and ethnic background. Three

participants listed the events put on by different organizations across campus, such as the Black History Month Celebrations, the Museum of Oppression, and Unity Week. One of the above participants felt that even though the campus promoted programs of African American culture and identity, at times there were other cultures that were not being appreciated or recognized on campus. He stated,

I'd like to see a lot of other cultures being represented, though, and not just Blacks. We have Asians, or the Latinos, and all the other groups not being recognized. I wish they were. Even with the fraternities and sororities, you hear a lot about them too. So, I think they provide ample opportunity for us to showcase our culture.

One of the remaining two participants felt that the University did not appreciate his racial and ethnic identity. He revealed that in some ways he too does not appreciate his own race.

I mean, actually, in some ways, I don't even think I appreciate my race. You know, I see a lot of events going on for African American students. However, I personally feel that some of these events are basically done so that African American students can't bitch about having nothing to do or life in a predominantly White environment. So, African American students haven't formed organizations and groups to complain about their lack of opportunities.

This participant felt as though the institution only puts on programs to make Black students happy. As he complained, it seemed as though he perceived the University as giving the Black students just what they need so they would not cause trouble on campus.

So basically it's like let's keep the Black people happy so they won't have to form an NAACP group or so they don't have to form another Black Student Union to take over and cause ruckus on this campus. I must also say at the same time there are Black events and things going on, on campus that I am pretty apt to attend. You know, it's more like I just kind of carry this attitude, like, okay, why should I care?

These men shared that there were events on campus for Black students, but felt either the events were not relevant or only targeted certain groups or cultures. One participant talked about the faculty and students who come to the events. His answer revealed that it seemed as though there are programs but no one appreciates African Americans enough to support the minority programs.

The institution tries to show appreciation by putting on programs. But the faculty and students don't appreciate us. A lot of the African Americans don't appreciate their own race. I would love to see more micro-interactions. I would also like to see more faculty at minority events.

When asked about the single most positive experience they've had as a Black male student, the participants gave interesting responses. Three of the five participants cited graduation as their most positive experience. These participants were excited that they were either going to graduate on time or it was just the fact that graduation was soon approaching. The excitement of one participant was mixed with overconfidence and pride. He recalled that people were surprised and amazed to find out he would be graduating on time. He stated,

When I was first informed, I was like, "Okay, big deal. Then, I mean, don't they all do that?" I was just talking to certain people on campus and it's like, "Damn, you know, four years." I have a pretty high g.p.a too, so it's just like that's not possible, you know. Plus, probably because of the fact I am a very outgoing person...you know, the life of the party, the life of any discussion, the life of everything. And I guess you probably wouldn't assume that I, of all people, would be graduating in four years with pretty good grades. So, I would like to say that graduating is my most positive experience here as a Black man.

The other two participants talked about graduation but were laid back and calm as opposed to the previously described participant. Overall, they all had a sense of accomplishment in the way they discussed their graduation.

Two participants talked about important relationships built as their single most positive experience as Black men. One participant talked about the relationships he built with people of different backgrounds and races. He shared,

I was the first Black friend that many of my White and non-Black peers ever had.

Interracial friendships have also been beneficial.

One participant smiled as he described his relationship with his friends from different backgrounds. It seemed as though being in a position where one can teach and expose others to something or someone different was not only perceived as a position of power but one that could facilitate the development of a sense of self-fulfillment or satisfaction.

Another participant mentioned a relationship with a successful African American professor who became his mentor. For this participant, it seemed important to interact

with someone who not only looked like him but someone who was also successful and possibly share common life experiences.

I've known him (the African American faculty mentor) for almost two years, and our relationship has impacted my life. I've gotten to know who I am as a person, the things I should take, thinking about grad school, thinking about the long term, with someone with the same ideas and goals that I had. I kind of see myself in him.

After talking about their experiences as Black men on campus, the participants were asked about their involvement in student organizations. Their involvement overall seemed to be a healthy part of their college careers. Each participant rattled off several organizations in which they were involved. Three of the five men were heavily involved in campus-wide organizations at some time in their college career. Their involvement ranged from being a part of the Black Student Union to National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) organizations to Resident Assistants, and to Honors Fraternities. These men held executive board positions in almost every organization they were members. The men were excited about their involvement and one participant felt as though his involvement in an Honors Fraternity made a significant difference in his leadership expertise. He stated,

It's been funny at times because at first the group was kind of very disorganized. The previous vice-president did nothing at all now that I'm on the board a lot has changed. I'm excited about that, so I'm just basically keeping everyone on his or her toes and making sure all goes well.

One of the participants stated that he did not enjoy his involvement with one of the organizations he became a part of; he felt that it was not for him. The one student with the least student organization involvement expressed that he enjoyed working closely with faculty and staff members but was himself not a "joiner."

I was involved in a faculty, staff, and student board. This was the only activity that I was involved in, and I enjoyed it.

Research Question Four: How does a Black male student's perception of himself affect his ability to succeed on a predominantly White campus?

Most of the participants seemed pretty confident and content when they communicated their personal perceptions and experiences. Participants' responses to some of the questions revealed that there were areas where the men did not seem as confident or sure. Some expressed that it was unsettling to talk about a topic in which one perceived themselves as the guinea pig for others. It was perhaps more unnerving when they considered themselves part of a group or culture where it seems that the odds are against them because of the many misconceptions about Black men.

Participants were asked a series of questions regarding when they realized they were Black. Other questions were asked of the participants to get a better understanding of how they viewed themselves and where they went when they needed support or help. The purpose of this series of questioning was to get a sense of each participant's level of cultural self-awareness. Simultaneously, several themes emerged in the area of self-perception.

The participants were asked about the first the time they discovered that they were a Black person. One of the participants seemed shocked and surprised when he heard the question. He responded with laughter and then with seriousness.

When I looked in the mirror. No, uh... Yeah, I guess. I mean I probably always knew I was Black.

He did not pinpoint an age or a time when he discovered that he was Black. The idea of ever not knowing that he was Black at any point in his life seemed to shock him.

All participants shared that they knew they were Black and their responses included very specific recent incidents where the color of their skin was a factor. One of the participants talked about Homecoming events. This past year there were several Black candidates for Homecoming court. He excitedly described the events of that day and the possibility of having an all Black Homecoming court. He went on to describe his perception of how the White students felt about Homecoming versus the Black students.

After they said the prince and princess, (who were Black) White people were getting like very alarmed. It was just like, "Shit, I bought a new suit and just got my hair done and I'm losing to this guy?" You know, they were like, "I'm losing to this Black guy?" The Black people for Homecoming had a different perception. We take it like, "Ok, I'm looking good, ok, if I lose, I don't give a care, and I'm going home." It was as if the White people saw it like, "It was something they were meant to do, it was like Prom King or something like that."

He described a more laid back attitude for the Black students, as opposed to the White students who were determined to win or to at least beat out the Black students. The experience of having a mostly Black Homecoming Court seemed to be a small triumph

for him. However, the divide between the Black students and the White students on the Court appeared to be clearly identifiable.

Another participant shared an experience where his choice of clothing and his skin color were the reason that he was pulled over by the police. One day he decided to wear earrings, a hat, and play loud music. He said that he felt he was looking pretty cool that day until he heard sirens and saw the bright lights behind him. He felt that he was pulled over because he fit the stereotype of a gangster. He appeared to be upset and irritated as he described the experience.

Any other day, when I go driving and I don't have my earrings in, my hat on, or my music turned on, I don't get pulled over. But when I look like the stereotypical image of what a gangsta is, I'm getting pulled over? I've never gotten pulled over before, ever.

He went on to describe how he felt violated,

I feel like I was violated just because of what I looked like. I guess if that's what you mean by being Black, you know, I think that's when I realized that there was a difference between the cultures.

One of the other participants explained he always knew he was Black but his experience was quite different from the other men. The majority of this participant's friends have always been White. He sadly expressed that whenever there was an incident, he's suddenly perceived as Black and they are all White. He communicated that he is the outcast or the one that does not fit in whenever there is an incident.

Another interesting comment was "This is a White world and you got to know what to do to survive." This participant felt as though being Black meant constantly being in a survival mode.

I was Black society born. It's kinda that way for me to know what you are. And you gotta know what you gotta do to survive, as far as growing up in a White world, as far as law enforcement and stuff goes. You gotta know what to do to survive.

The participants talked about where they went support for when they were upset. Most of the participants preferred to go it alone. Two of the participants simply said that they preferred to handle their own problems. Their ways of coping varied from venting to friends, writing, or retreating to a self established comfort zone. They seemed frustrated as they revealed this information but they also seemed accustomed to dealing with issues on their own. The typical response,

You know, handling my own situations is cool and being in this comfort zone just allows me to go through those upsetting times, those frustrating times.

Sometimes it allows me to see that I am wrong, or whatever the case.

Two of the remaining participants also had similar answers. They both talked about listening to music. One of the participants talked about why he used music as an escape when he is upset.

I just like my music. It's just sometimes you just need to be by yourself, and not, you know, just be near anyone.

One mentioned either working out or talking to his sibling also served as a release.

I go to my apartment and I turn on some music, or I go the gym and I run on the track, or I lift weights, talk to my sister, or I go out, you know.

The last participant when asked where he goes for support, replied with confidence, "church" and left it at that.

Since most of the participants answered that they handled their own problems, it was important to find out if any of them had a mentor. Only one participant described a mentoring relationship, as previously quoted. His verbal and nonverbal communication showed that this relationship was extremely important to him. He went on to add that his college experience would have been quite different had he not meet his mentor.

Two of the participants could never recall having a mentor. One of them simply stated that he did not take up the offer. The other participant said that even though he did not have a mentor, or folks to emulate, he had plenty of examples.

Growing up in my neighborhood you have plenty of examples of people who had it but didn't make it. You have the examples of those who just aren't going to make it. I kind of use these people as my examples just to kind of push forward and make that grade, join organizations, take on that leadership position because there have been times in my life when I should not be in college.

This participant had a different perspective when it came to mentoring. He looked at the people around him who were not successful and used their examples to push himself forward. He seemed truly thankful for the opportunity to be in college.

Another area discussed was each participant's elementary school experience. This was a key area that was mentioned in the research and it is important to include in the present research. When these participants were asked about their elementary school

experiences and how they were treated in class, three described contentment with their elementary school experience and the remaining two were less satisfied. One contented participant stated,

I grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood, so I was a member of the majority. I actually had an African American teacher in elementary school. You know, relating to someone in the classroom. So it was cool.

This participant seemed to have enjoyed his experience mainly because he could connect with his teacher. He smiled as he talked about this connection.

The two participants who did not enjoy their experience both went to predominantly White institutions. One of the men shared that he had a teacher in fifth grade who was both sexist and racist.

I was eventually transferred out of the class because the teacher gave me such a hard time. I couldn't understand why the teacher wanted to hurt a child because they're Black and a male.

As he shared his story, it was obvious that this experience with his teacher traumatized him. The other participant shared a different story. He felt more comfortable in the White school because there was less pressure to fit in, as far as clothing and haircuts were concerned. He stated,

I went to school and I enjoyed it because I wasn't worried about what I had to wear, or how my hair looked, or you know all the physical attributes that you know that other Black people find important. From 1st through 5th grade, I really did happen to enjoy school.

When he went to the Black school he did not fit in and his grades began to suffer. He went on to describe his experience.

When I got to 6th grade, I unfortunately was at a Black school and I came from an all White school, so I was like this Black child with this high voice, talking real proper. You know what I'm saying. And it's like, you ain't got no haircut, you got no corduroys, you got on Jordache, tennis shoes, you know it's a very stereotypical image of what a Black 6th grader is supposed to wear. So it took a toll on my grades academically because I was so focused on trying to fit in.

His main struggle was adjusting from a predominantly White institution to a predominantly Black institution. What this participant described can be difficult for anyone but for him, as a Black male, going from one culture to another was shocking and almost detrimental to his personal development.

Summary of Findings

Significant amounts of verbal data were collected during the interviews. The participants were asked several questions that were related to the four main research areas. Those areas were: 1) parental influence; 2) societal influence and stereotypes; 3) institutional environment, and 4) perception of self. These four areas correlated with the information presented in the literature review of Black men and higher education, and the researcher's personal knowledge of Black men and their experiences.

The first research area focused on the role that family plays in a Black male's college career. The participants revealed that their siblings were a motivation for them to complete college. Most of the participants saw themselves as role models for their

siblings. Additionally, some of the participants said that their family problems were a source of stress for them.

The second research area focused on how societal perceptions and stereotypes about Black men affected the lives and upbringing of the participants. Several themes emerged as the participants were asked about different stereotypes in the media and in their home neighborhoods. The students mentioned the stereotypic hip-hop image that makes Black men out to be materialistic. They talked about the men they grew up with who succumbed to drugs or factory jobs instead of pursuing higher education. Finally, the participants talked about their lists of stereotypes about Black men and the individual ways in which they were affected by the stereotypes.

The third research area was an attempt to get the men to reveal how they were treated on campus as Black men. The participants revealed that they were content with the institution overall, but there were changes in institutional atmosphere they thought needed to be made. Some of the participants shared that the institution did not show an appreciation of their Black identity, while others felt that the institution did not do enough to appreciate all of the minority populations. The most interesting response from all of the students was that their single greatest moment of going to the institution as a Black man was their impending graduation.

The final research area was designed to focus on the participant's view of themselves in relation to their relationships with mentors, and how in tune they were with their Black identity. This area was intended to assess the participant's mindsets and whether or not they reached out to others or kept their own counsel when they were upset. All of the participants either named an activity such as exercise, listening to

music, or going to church. Most of the activities involved an individual's approach to solving their problems.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This present study was designed to explore the experiences of five Black male students at a predominantly White institution in the Midwest. Four main research areas were used to reveal any factors that may lead to Black male success at one predominantly White institution. This chapter is a comparison between the information in the literature review and the findings from the interviews of the five participants. This chapter will conclude with a list of recommendations for student affairs practitioners and future researchers, and a conclusion to the study.

Significance of Results

Several conclusions were drawn about the success of Black men at predominately White institutions after analyzing the interview responses of these five men. Within the four research areas, parental influence, societal influence and stereotypes, institutional environment, and perception of self, there were several similarities and differences identified in the student's answers and in the existing literature. The Black male students in the present study seemed ready to face the world academically and socially. They all had a social network and they were graduating. The connection between the research and the findings is that all of the participants indicated that their families were a great source of support. The empowerment of the Black male must begin in the home, with parents who can promote the attitudes, behaviors, and values necessary for academic and social success (Lee, 1996, p. 128). The participants exhibited levels of accomplishment, and unique ways of dealing with the world. They seemed to be highly aware of themselves, autonomous and confident. Although they seemed to be approaching a stage of

independence it was evident that a strong family background and sense of responsibility for someone other than themselves was a driving force behind their college success and their ability to face the world. But, along with the support from their families, there was also stress. While their families were supportive, the students also shared that thinking of home, their neighborhood, or family problems contributed to the stress they identified. Another element of stress was the expectation that the participants with siblings were expected to be role models for their younger siblings. The role of big brother seemed to motivate the participants to remain focused and reach their goal of graduation.

The participants worked hard to overcome several obstacles to reach their goal of graduation and degree attainment. One of these obstacles is present in American education everyday. Most of the Black men in college today grew up in elementary schools where history class was based on European culture. From an early age these Black students were denied the right to learn about their culture and their heritage. Being in a classroom where one only learns about people who are culturally and ethnically different can be damaging to a young Black male. There appears to be a subliminal message sent that Black men are not important in school or in the larger society. The adoption of largely White cultural values or behaviors may be detrimental to some Black adolescents' self-esteem and racial identity development because it may promote the misconception that Black is inferior to White (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002, p. 330).

The many stereotypes about Black men and the realities of their impact are enough to dissuade a person without positive role models, and a strong support network. The participants described their neighborhoods and the rarity of college attendance and success among their neighbors. Most of them came from places where it seemed that the

only option for young Black men was to sell drugs, whereas this stereotype did not apply to them. Overall, the participants were disgusted with the portrayal of Black men in the media. The participants shared that they felt as though their peers expected them to act like the Black men on television. The popular image of the Black man is one of failure, and poverty. Fields (2001) expressed it best when she stated, "everybody thinks the Black generation isn't going anywhere" (p. 15). The participants were aware of the many stereotypes that exist about Black men. One participant was angry because he has the job of "going out everyday and proving the stereotypes wrong." This was an added pressure because these Black males were unable to be normal college students, they have the burden of proving to everyone that they were not lazy, or dumb, and the list goes on.

Even with all of the stereotypes and the negative images in the participants' neighborhoods, they persisted in obtaining their educational goals. This can again be attributed in part to their strong support network. However, it was evident that the participants from two-parent homes seemed to have the advantage. According to Wagener & Nettles (1998, p. 19), "when African American men enter college they are more likely to come from less well educated families, often with a single parent. Thus with fewer home resources to rely on than the average white student." It was clear that there as a difference between the two groups of men: products of two-parent family versus single parent family structures. One difference observed was that the students from single parent homes had a certain confidence and will power about them that the other students did not exhibit. Perhaps this extra confidence came from more responsibility in the household due to only having one parent. Overall the participants exhibited a sense of drive, something their friends who did not make it, did not have.

In addition to this drive, the men mentioned several people who were key in their success. They mentioned having relatives who went to college and teachers who cared. Some of the people these young Black men looked up to did not send the message that college was the thing to do (Lomax in Roach, 2001, p. 19). The young men in the present study were fortunate to have people who shared a positive attitude and value regarding the collegiate experience.

The college experience is not one that can be mapped out or truly captured in a textbook. It is obvious that the college experience varies based on the individual and location of the institution, among other factors. However, and especially for the five Black males at this Midwestern institution, their experiences in regard to the institutional environment and whether or not they felt accepted by their peers, faculty, and staff were significant.

The participants were content with the campus environment as a whole, but their contentment only went so far. Each of the participants described incidents where they felt uncomfortable due to being at a predominantly White institution. According to Gurin and Epps (1975, p. 141), many Black students prefer to attend colleges where the campus ambience supports their personal development without the level of conflict and isolation experienced on predominantly White campuses. In talking with the students it seemed clear that their experience would have been more rewarding if they were at an institution where they felt truly appreciated and accepted. The appreciation that the men were seeking would have to come from peers, faculty, and staff.

The University sponsored a number of Black history activities and there was a Black Student Union, but the men did not feel that these planned activities were efforts to

include the Black population on campus but an effort to keep Black people from complaining. With regard to the local community, participants' felt it was important that the community also accept and appreciate differences because Black students were also their customers and neighbors. The participants described the looks they often received from the townspeople as stares of disgust. The racial, social, and cultural environments on and off campus were questionable. Even though there was a doubt among the men as to whether the institution was sincere in its diversity efforts, they took advantage of opportunities to become involved in campus activities and organizations.

All of the participants had participated in at least one campus sponsored organization or event. Their involvement on campus was helpful because it created a connection and a sense of belonging to the institution. Sutton and Terrell (1997) agreed that getting Black men involved in the community and campus environment could help them realize that the entire campus community embraces their "leadership contributions and values". This seemed to hold true for the participants in the present study. All of the participants enjoyed their leadership experiences on campus and spoke with confidence and excitement as they described their involvement. According to Sedlacek (2004), "students who are active in the community learn how to handle the system, exhibit leadership, and develop their self-concept in such groups" (p. 47). As shown by the Black males in the present study, it was not only important for them to be involved on campus, according to Wagener and Nettles (1998), "the campus community must also foster the intellectual and social development of all students".

The participants were extremely aware of what was going on at the institution and

how they fit into the scheme of things. They found out how to go at it alone. Some of the participants had mentors, but overall, all of the participants handled their problems on their own. This individualism exhibited by the participants was a display of strength, but it was also a problem. In general, American men are conditioned to go it alone (Cuyjet as cited in Roach, 2001) as part of the importance placed on individualism versus a collectivist paradigm. These Black men were on a campus where they were in the minority. Most of their peers, faculty, and staff members did not look like them. According to Aker (2004), "a true appreciation of differences that many universities advocate as one component of their educational mission cannot be met with a staff of predominantly White men. The feeling of inclusion that is vitally important in the retention and success of minority students cannot be found on a campus where all students and administrators are of the same gender and same ethnicity." There was no mystery as to why these men chose to handle problems on their own. The men did not reach out because they were conditioned to function as individuals, especially on a predominantly White campus.

Although the men did go to an institution where they were in the minority, they were still able to make important connections with some of their peers. The men were able to build lifelong friendships and connections. Some of the men were very passionate when they spoke of the friends they made. This bond was extremely important because it widened the men's support system. It seemed critical that these men found others who were like themselves. This seemed to make their experience less difficult.

The men had an excellent grasp on what they needed to do in order to be successful at a predominantly White institution. The men exhibited a sense of awareness

and confidence which clearly helped them reach their goal. These men appeared to be aware of themselves and who they were as people, and this can be possibly be attributed to their attendance at a predominantly White institution, as noted by Taylor (2003). This awareness came with time and maturity level.

Each of the men knew that they were Black, either through some incident or just looking in the mirror. Perceived racial incidents varied from being pulled over by the police because of a stereotype to the experience of being on a traditionally all White homecoming court. The various incidents described by the students helped them develop a new level of understanding about how they fit into the institution and the larger society. The student's ability to understand themselves in relation to the world around them and their okay as it is display of self-confidence and self-worth undoubtedly propelled them forward.

While all of the men were successful, it is important to note that for one of the participants obtaining success seemed to be more of a struggle. This participant understood what it meant to be Black but at the same time he did not have a clear understanding of himself. According to Taylor (in James, 1998, p. 229), "the majority of African American students at predominantly White institutions who wished to be accepted by their White counterparts did not have a clear understanding of themselves." This particular participant expressed that most of his friendships were with White students. He seemed to be at a lower level of self-development than the other participants in the present study who had more relationships with other Black students.

Conclusions drawn from the present study:

1. Having a strong familial background is necessary for Black males to be successful in a predominantly White institution.
2. Having a younger sibling at home, and/or being placed in role model positions helps motivate Black males to successfully complete their college degree requirements.
3. Being exposed to college settings, attitudes and values early helps Black males understand the importance of receiving a college education.
4. Personal self-confidence and a sense of self-worth in the face of little or no institutional support are important for the success of a Black male student.
5. Being exposed to Black culture and heritage at an early age can add to a Black male's understanding of himself in relation to the world.
6. Black males were aware of and affected both positively and negatively by the many stereotypes about Black men and felt that they had the task of proving the negative stereotypes wrong in their everyday encounters.
7. Having successful Black role models, professors, or mentorship programs, is an important part of a Black man's success at a predominantly White institution.
8. A Black male's participation in a campus organization or sponsored activity can establish a sense of belonging or create a connection to the institution.
9. Creating an environment where Black men feel appreciated and welcome within the institution aides in their goal of graduation.

10. Creating a network amongst the Black men on campus can aide them in understanding themselves at a faster pace and creating lifelong friendships.

Recommendations:

Student Affairs Practitioners:

1. It is important to establish a connection between students, faculty and staff members. This relationship can be used to describe how Black males are affected by being on a predominantly White campus.
2. Establishing a connection with other student affairs practitioners to create a social outlet, or a mentoring program for Black male students, can give students the connections needed for Black male student success. A great place to start is by adopting the mentorship program known as the Student African American Brotherhood (S.A.A.B.). More information can be found at <http://www.2cusaab.org/>. This organization provides support and promotes leadership for African American male students.
3. By actively recruiting Black males to work in higher education, institutions can have people in place who look like Black students. These men can be key in the success of Black male undergraduates.
4. It is imperative to continue creating workshops and presentations on how to connect with and support Black male students at predominantly White campuses.

Future Researchers:

1. The participants in the present study discussed their elementary school experiences. Future research could examine the elementary school experiences of

Black males and what influence or effect that experience had on their development as a Black male, and if it affected their college success.

2. The present study discussed parental involvement. Further research could examine the independence exhibited by the men from single parent homes compared to the men from two parent homes.
3. Fully examining the men's levels of awareness of their Black identity could be helpful in understanding the ability of Black males to network with other Black students.
4. Research on another segment of the population that is somewhat similar, i.e. athletes versus non-athletes, can be helpful in examining differences between Black males students at predominantly White institutions.
5. Compare campuses-one with a "pro-active welcoming atmosphere" versus those that do not have a "proactive welcoming atmosphere or reputation.
6. Identify attributes that facilitate hostile versus non-hostile environments on a predominantly White campus.
7. A mixed method longitudinal study on Black male college students' progression through college could be conducted as a way of assessing Black male identity development during the college years.

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