

2017

# Access to Higher Education for Black Men: A Narrative Perspective

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## Recommended Citation

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Access to Higher Education for Black Men:

A Narrative Perspective

(TITLE)

BY

Kayla R. Branch

**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

2017

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING  
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### **Abstract**

A college degree is important because it provides opportunities for graduates to become educated in a field of study that they can start a career in. There is a large underrepresentation of Black male students in higher education. This lack of representation reflects the lack of professional Black men in our society and limits the number of Black role models these men have can look up tot. The purpose of the qualitative study is to identify what influences Black men to attend college and what challenges they may face getting admitted to college. It also examined how these men transition to a predominantly White institution and adjust to their new environments. Results from the study presents influences, challenges, and identifies how the transition to college is experienced by Black men providing a better understanding of they perceived their college admission journey. These results are guides to help professionals within education guide Black men to college.

**Key Words:** Black men, college admission, transition to college

### **Dedication**

So many individuals have been inspirational to me throughout my journey completing this study. I would first like to dedicate this hard work to my mother Delores Hopkins. Not only would I not be living today without her, I would not be the person I am without her. Growing up and seeing my mother work hard to support my sisters and I instilled a thirst for success inside of me that has not yet been quenched. I am motivated to do better not only for myself but for her and my family. I would also like to dedicate this study to one of my closest friends Cecil Black. Witnessing his process through college encouraged me to want to learn more about Black men and their journey through post-secondary education. It made me question if other Black men had his same struggles and made me further question why I saw a lack of Black men in my college classrooms. I would like to extend a thank you to my friends and family for supporting me through this process, during the cool revelations, and the tough nights researching, you were always there.

Thank you!

### **Acknowledgments**

The process of conducting this study was extremely difficult and could not be completed without the assistance of my committee members Dr. Dianne Timm, Dr. Mona Davenport, and Jeremy Alexander. These individuals were an essential tool in guiding me through my research process.

Dr. Timm, thank you for all your help, you were the backbone behind the study and guided me through the entire process, directing me when I got off track. You supported me when I became overwhelmed and helped me recover when I cried about documents that didn't save. Thank you for all the support through this magnificent journey.

Mona, thank you for your great perspectives. You pointed me in the right direction several times and told me like it was when you didn't agree with me. The data you provided me with was extremely helpful to the study. You were also very helpful in assisting me with finding participants. Thank you for all your help and doing what you do for minority students.

Jeremy, thank you for your incisive eyesight. You were very observant and quick to find small details that were missed to correct. You paid close attention to detail and made sure that not only the study but the grammar and resources were correct. Thank you for making sure my study is great.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Dedication.....	2
Acknowledgments.....	3
<b>Chapter 1.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Introduction.....	7
Purpose of the Study.....	11
Research Questions.....	11
Significance of the Study.....	11
Limitations.....	13
Definition of Terms.....	14
Summary.....	15
<b>Chapter 2.....</b>	<b>16</b>
Review of Literature.....	16
Education in the Black Community.....	16
Access to Higher Education.....	20
Black Students Experiences at PWIs.....	24
Benefits of Higher Education.....	26
Role Models for Black Men.....	26
Theoretical Perspectives.....	27
Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory.....	28
Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Theory of Identity.....	30
Cross (2001) Theory of Black Identity Development.....	34
Summary.....	38
<b>Chapter 3.....</b>	<b>39</b>
Methodology.....	39
Design of Study.....	39
Participants.....	39
Site.....	40
Instrument.....	41
Data Collection.....	41
Treatment of Data.....	41
Data Analysis.....	42
Summary.....	42
<b>Chapter 4.....</b>	<b>43</b>
Narratives.....	43
Michael.....	43
Derek.....	47
Anthony.....	51
James.....	53
Summary.....	57

<b>Chapter 5</b> .....	58
Analysis.....	58
Influences for Black Men to Attend College.....	58
Family.....	58
Coaches/Mentors.....	60
Neighborhoods.....	60
Elementary/High School.....	61
Challenges Black Men Face Getting Admitted to Higher Education.....	62
College Preparation.....	62
First Generation College Students.....	63
Obstacles Black Men Identify in Transitioning to a PWI.....	64
Transition to College.....	64
Transition to a PWI.....	66
Summary.....	67
<b>Chapter 6</b> .....	68
Discussion.....	68
Influences for Black Men to Attend College.....	68
Neighborhoods.....	69
Family Structure.....	69
Resources.....	70
Self-Motivation.....	72
Challenges Black Men Face Getting Admitted to Higher Education.....	73
Low Test Scores.....	73
First Generation Students.....	73
Obstacles in Transitioning to College.....	75
Transition to College.....	75
Relationships.....	75
Academics.....	76
Involvement.....	76
Transition to a PWI.....	77
Uncomfortable & Stressed.....	77
Implications.....	78
Student Affairs Professionals.....	78
Black Males.....	80
Teachers & Guidance Counselors.....	81
Recommendations for Future Research.....	83
Summary.....	84
References.....	86
Appendix A- Interview Protocol.....	94
Appendix B- Email to Potential Participants.....	96
Appendix C- Consent to Participate in Research.....	97



Thesis

Access to Higher Education for Black Male Students: A Narrative Perspective

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Eastern Illinois University

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Black people in America have negative stigmas attached to their existence (Celious & Oyserman, 2001; Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas & Thompson, 2004, Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Harper, 2015; Strayhorn, 2009). Living within a society where being a specific race consequently prevents certain successes, is difficult to say the least. This is a result of stereotypes placed upon Black people (Celious & Oyserman, 2001; Davis et al.'s, 2004; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Harper, 2015, Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000; Strayhorn, 2009). According to Celious and Oyserman (2001) research and society tend to focus on negative stereotypes about Black people. They go on to say that these stereotypes are problematic because they portray a distorted view of Black people. The separation of this group is unfortunate because it is a missed opportunity of what positive qualities exist and prevents each group from benefiting from each other.

Although there are negative stigmas associated to Black people in general, Black men are more likely to be discriminated against (Celious & Oyserman, 2001; Rodriguez, 2008). Celious and Oyserman (2001) expressed that "the Black experience is generally defined by the male Black experience" (p. 155). Women, who recently in history received rights equal to men are commonly stereotyped for not being as smart, or as educated as men, so men (Especially Black men) being a valid source of representation is important. Celious and Oyserman also stated "stereotypes about Black men elicit fear and hostility from out-groups" (p. 155). Beliefs and such stereotypes like this can only increase the distance of the connection between Black men and society. Black men often

believe they themselves are more likely to be discriminated against and treated poorly than any other race, including black females (Rodriguez, 2008).

Black males have been exposed to certain stereotypes from an early age, faced with negative messages regarding their abilities, actions, and expectations, all presented by the media for everyone to interpret (Davis, 2003). The media usually associates a demeaning description of Black males as being gang members, aggressive, rude, or drug dealers (Hilton, 2015). Having these negative associations causes Black males to be socialized in a negative manner which can lead to lower confidence in their school performance (Baggerly & Max, 2005). Kayoko Peralta (2016), further explains the difference in education Black students receive by stating “In educational settings, students of color experience racial isolation, stereotype threat, racial microaggressions, identity performance, and racial labor” (p. 176). The lack of presence of Black male authority figures in schools furthers the belief of not belonging in the school’s environment (Hilton, 2015). Black males are more likely to be academically disciplined such as detention and suspension at an unfair rate (Hilton, 2015), increasing the odds of them being socialized and following their assumed expectations. It is important that research is performed to examine how Black men are pursuing degrees despite the low expectations placed upon them (Harper, 2015).

Black women are more likely to enroll in college than Black men, Black women are outnumbering and outperforming their male counterparts (Gose, 2014, Hilton, 2015; Schmidt, 2009; Strayhorn, 2015). In 2009-2010, the percent of Black females earning degrees compared to their male counterparts was 65.9% (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). In 2014 the amount of Black freshman students attending a four-year college was

11.1% (Almanac, 2015). Of this small number of Black students attending higher education, most of these students enrolled and graduating are Black females. At the location of this study Black students enrolled in fall 2015 totaled 1,353 (19%) out of a total of 7,202 students. Of the Black students, 839 (62%) were female and 514 (38%) were male. Although the local data provides a higher percentage of Black men enrolled it does not differ too much from the national numbers, Black men are enrolling at lower rate; and we are left to wonder what can be done to improve these numbers?

Research focusing on Black men and higher education has expanded tremendously (Hilton, 2015; Harper, 2015; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Gose, 2014; Schmidt, 2009; Strayhorn, 2015). That research can assist professionals in how to help Black men succeed against the odds they face in attaining their degree. Racism has an effect on how Black men involve themselves in higher education (Ingram, 2013). In a study conducted by Strayhorn (2009) Black collegians at a predominantly White institution (PWI) revealed feeling it necessary to prove themselves equal to their White counterparts. Black men begin facing many disadvantages at such a young age, discrimination within the school can be discouraging causing these Black men to choose options other than college, and even if they pick college there are many more hurdles that they will need to overcome.

Being admitted into a college or university is not easy. Racism and stereotypes cause Black students to underperform and have low self-esteem resulting in performing as they are expected to by society (Harper, 2015). Although this is recognized, standardized tests are still used in determining admission into college (Palmer, Wood, Dancy II, Strayhorn, 2014). An attempt to present equal opportunities to individuals

likely not given equal opportunities to attend a college or university is affirmative action, which has been dramatically challenged in higher education (Detterman, 2000; Palmer et al., 2014). Currently there are few opportunities for Black men to take advantage of affirmative action due to several states abandoning the idea; if more opportunities were available this would create more pathways for the Black male population to gain entrance into college (Palmer et al., 2014). If able to become admitted, Black men are afforded an opportunity to be involved in programs that provide additional support to this population such as the TRIO program (Palmer et al., 2014).

Although faced with several obstacles in being admitted to higher education some of these men overcome their challenges. What motivates them to succeed against their struggles? Not every Black man attending college will go on to receive a degree. Those that do receive degrees have struggles and stories that need to be heard to help those that are not motivated to succeed. The location of the study was a predominantly White rural area at a four-year midsized college located in the Mid-West. The struggle Black men face in higher education can sometimes be coupled with external concerns as well, like a community with a predominately White population. Stereotypes and assumptions have been made about those Black students who seem to be different and present challenges to these Black men in a predominantly white community. Living under such conditions where Black students don't feel they belong can have a tremendous effect on their academic and personal growth (Harper, 2015; Kayoko Peralta, 2016; Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine what leads Black men to higher education. Black students are positively encouraged to enter college based on their educational and occupation aspirations (Strayhorn, 2015). Although Black students have greater access to higher education today, Black women are still the dominant population taking advantage of the opportunities present in higher education communities (Schmidt, 2009). In order to understand Black men's lack of presence in higher education the secondary purpose of the study was to discover what obstacles Black men face in entering higher education. Not only was it important to understand the challenges Black men face in getting to college it was also critical to understand what motivates Black men toward completion of their degree. In finding out what challenges they faced attending college and attaining their degree, this research will assist faculty and staff in supporting and helping this population.

**Research Questions**

1. What influences Black men to attend college?
2. What challenges are Black men facing getting admitted to higher education?
3. What obstacles do Black men identify in transitioning to a PWI college?

**Significance of the Study**

Experiencing life in today's society as a Black woman afforded me the opportunity to be empathetic to my male interviewees but not completely understanding of their positions and situations. As an undergraduate at the research study institution I saw many of my Black male classmates underrepresented and performing below the average. There were always a greater number of Black females compared to males in the

classroom. I've witnessed some men not take school as serious as their peers. As a Black woman, I would like to be an advocate for other Black individuals and prove their worth and value.

During my college searching process I was fortunate to be involved in a college preparatory class for the entire four years of high school. This class called AVID (Advanced-Via-Individual-Determination), focused on teaching us the expectations of college and how to take proper notes in a college setting. This class presented an opportunity to educate students on what to expect from college. The experience was fortunate for me because my parents did not go to college but I still received guidance as if my parents did. This experience is not always common in the Black community, especially for Black men. Lacking this opportunity among others prevents preparation of higher education as well as access.

At the research institution during the fall semester of 2015 there were a total of 8,520 students enrolled (7,202 undergraduates). Of the total number of students enrolled 16.9% (n = 1,441) were Black. The average undergraduate GPA for Black men in 2015 was 2.49 compared to 2.64 GPA of their female counterparts. The average GPA of undergraduate students of all demographics was 3.13. These statistics validate that this population is coming in with a different level of preparation and performance and how important it is to help our Black students. Black men are enrolling at lower rates than Black females but failing at equal or higher rates. What is causing these Black men to underperform so often is a very important question to find the answer to. Black men receiving assistance from specific support programs seems to perform slightly better than those not receiving help at all. Determining what motivates Black men not involved in

these service programs will give clearer understanding of what encourages them towards academic success.

I have heard stories of struggles from Black men who want to be successful but are discouraged because they feel like everyone is already against them. From my personal conversations, some of these Black men feel secluded and not expected to do well and as a result they underperform; they believe what is told or shown to them and they give in to a society that does not understand or want to understand them. I want to identify ways to increase Black male's success, to even the "playing field" in a sense. Their success can benefit not only them, but others around them who look like them. The majority of student affairs officials at PWI's are White and may not fully understand the experiences of the Black men or Black students in general. Studying what Black students are receptive to and what can aid in their academic success provides much needed insight on how to approach these students. Student affairs officials will have sources to utilize when engaging with these students and ways to modify the results of this research through their personal experiences.

### **Limitations**

*Questioning.* As this was a qualitative study, only a few Black male students were selected to participate in this study leaving it impossible to generalize the findings for all Black men in higher education. The research questions were not exhaustive as possible to receive the most detailed responses. Although the responses were as detailed as possible, the responses should not be generalized for all Black male students. I am a Black woman, because of this my opinions throughout the study can possibly be biased.



*Location.* The location of the Midwestern mid-sized university can influence the responses. Although racism and issues with Black men attending college is nation-wide, the opinions and experiences can be extremely different than those located in different areas like the south. The population is predominately White; in 2013 the population totaled 21,961, seven percent were Black.

*Gender/Race.* The research only focuses on Black male students, and the research should not be interpreted for Black students in general, or assumed applicable to other non-White populations. The lack of Black female participants prevents opposing opinions and how they can possibly influence opinions of Black males.

*Neighborhoods.* All participants in the study grew up in or near a large Midwestern city in Illinois. The participants living in the same area limits the variation of experiences the students are likely to endure throughout their education. Most of the participants came from urban settings and predominantly Black neighborhoods. The environments of the participants influence the way they perceive the world around them.

*Family.* All participants came from a single-parent household with the mother being the sole parent. These males do not have a father figure in the home to guide them. Although they had their mothers support with the idea of college, they had no male role model to aspire to be like.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Black/African American.** Racial category of African American decent. (Both words are interchangeable)

**College Choice.** Involves decisions made by students on where to apply to college and if admitted making the decision to attend (Cox, 2016).

**Degree Completion.** Graduating and receiving an award identifying college completion.

**First Generation.** A student whose parents did not graduate from college.

**Higher Education/ Postsecondary Education.** Continuing to seek a degree or education after obtaining a high school degree or equivalent. (Both words are interchangeable)

**Retention.** The number of students entering college and persisting towards their studies and graduating (Wyman, 1997).

**Student Support Services.** Federally funded programs provided to students considered first-generation, low income, or a student with disabilities.

**Underperforming.** Not performing at the regular rate.

## **Summary**

Chapter I contains a description of the present study. The introduction goes into detail about the issues of the lack of presence of Black men in higher education. There is a brief description examining the importance of Black men's learning history that can assist in understanding their struggles. The purpose of this study was to examine what influences Black men through their journey in higher education to persist. Chapter II discusses the struggles of Black students providing examples of studies performed to enhance Black student's academic success. It also describes the struggles these students face while studying at a PWI. The research emphasizes the importance of the study and suggestions on how to improve Black male student's access to higher education and academic performance.

## Chapter II

### Review of Literature

The intent of this chapter is to provide supportive evidence of issues Black male students face and examine claims on positive solutions to aid them with their success. In order to analyze Black male students and their academic process, identifying what influences Black men to attend college is important. First the history and perspectives of education from kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) in the Black community will be examined. This will give an understanding of how Black individuals experience school and what aids in their decisions. Next, how Black students are accessing higher education will be investigated to determine available attainment opportunities for these students. Along with attainment, institution options available for higher education will be examined such as PWIs and Historically Black College or Universities (HBCUs). Benefits of a college degree will be investigated to determine what factors are motivating these students to college success and role models available to Black men will be examined. Several theories will also be used to explore the development of Black students.

#### Education in the Black Community

Black individuals have not always had access to education. In 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* legalized segregation, as long as conditions were "separate but equal" for Black institutions (Heilig, Reddick, Hamilton, & Dietz, 2010). During this time Black students were permitted education but not in the same setting as White students. This separation itself was not equal and prohibited Black students from reaching their full potential. Some assessments taken have indicated that Black students tend to score lower than

White students at a national level and they have a lower academic achievement rate (Robinson, 2010).

Their education throughout the K-12 school level has shown that Black students continue to have lower reading and mathematics scores than their White counterparts; the Black-White gap is largest especially in math between the kindergarten and third grade level (Robinson, 2010). Although Black students are struggling to keep up academically, scores indicate that all students' scores increase at each grade level (Robinson, 2010). According to Robinson (2010), it is unclear what is causing the Black-White achievement gap throughout K-12 schooling; in order to obtain equality, the racial and ethnic achievement gap must be reduced. More research must be obtained to get a better understanding of what can be done to solve this issue.

There are major concerns about how Black students, especially Black males, are far behind their White peers (Willen, 2015). There is no indication of a solution to this unfortunate circumstance, despite the odds against Black student's poor academic performances, Black male students in some circumstances prevail. Some Black males express their concerns within society by revealing common feelings of being viewed as monsters; Black boys also feel like they are destined to fail in public schools, and struggle with certain stereotypes and teachers second guessing their potential, which thus becomes discouraging over time (Willen, 2015). Results from certain tests provide supporting evidence of Black students performing at lower rates. In 2014, 24% of Black students passed the state's science test, while 61% of White students passed (Willen, 2015). Student development and academic achievement is dependent upon several entities outside of the individual student. A few lengths have been taken to assist with

the diverse learning outcomes. Oakland, California became the first district to focus on improving statistics of Black boys; fighting the numbers of Black boys being killed rather than graduating from high school or college (Willen, 2015). More programs have been created to assist underrepresented students in need, more will need to be created with a full understanding of what underrepresented children, focusing on Black male students, need in specific programs and determine how they can achieve their goals.

Several circumstances can cause students to perform poorly in school. School disciplinary outcomes are unfair for minority students, especially Black students in the United States (U.S.) (Hoffman, 2014). Black students are punished at an alarmingly higher rate (Hoffman, 2014). There are enormous inequalities in school discipline between Black and White students, but this hardly receives policy attention (Hoffman, 2014). The issue of unfair treatment is noted but hardly changed due to conformity and lack of care. Hoffman (2014) discussed how recent issues in our society, such as unjust killings within the Black community have raised issues of what affect zero tolerance policies have on Black children. Zero tolerance policies have expanded the categories of behaviors that warrants suspension and or expulsion whether the act be intentional, accidental, serious, or trivial (Black, 2015). Skiba and Rausch (2006) stated that zero tolerance discipline policies are associated with poor school climate, lower student achievement, and higher dropout rates; supporting these policies only contributes to the racial inequalities between White and Black students. Enforcing these zero tolerance policies leads to excessive suspension and expulsion rates, this is denying students access to services and failing to improve their behavior (LaMarche, 2011). Offenses warranting expulsion include possession/use of a weapon, physical assault to a faculty member, and

selling illegal drugs at school; offenses warranting suspension are fighting, physical assault and property damage (Hoffman, 2014).

Black students are not only academically challenged, but unfairly disciplined too. Black students are three times more likely to be disciplined than White students (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Willen, 2015). In a study performed by Gregory and Mosely (2004), they examined teachers' process of discipline referrals that affect the over-representation of Black students. The study was performed in a mid-sized city in the U.S. at a large urban high school. While doing research on the teachers, statistics were also taken of the students and the disciplinary system. Between 1999-2000, 37% of Black students enrolled at the high school, accounted for 80% of students suspended; while 37% of White students enrolled in the high school accounted for 9% of students suspended (Gregory & Mosely, 2004). Interviews were conducted to determine how teachers identify troubled youth and if they understand the causes of discipline problems, as well as how they handle them. The results showed that teachers considered the student and the surroundings as the cause of discipline, but most remained quiet on the topic of racial patterns in discipline (Gregory & Mosely, 2004). This study showed how, at this location, discipline of Black and White students is significantly skewed, but the topic was not being addressed among teachers and staff. Casella (2003) argued punishment only negatively affects individuals that are already negatively affected in society. The zero tolerance policies among other policies are hindering the performance of Black students and their success levels. Black (2015) discussed how Black students in high school who are suspended are likely to drop out and are then consequently directed to the path of

prison. Black students are punished today for things that would just be ignored in the past.

Policies were created to assist struggling students in unfair climates like No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which set the goal of making all public school students skillful in reading and math by 2014 (Kahlenberg, 2006). This has attempted to help but has not been a proven solution for improvement. The education of students is not the sole indicator of student status; the environment also affects a students' ability to learn. According to Kahlenberg (2006) schools with high poverty levels tend to have more difficult learning environments; these students were less likely to come from family environments that support academic achievement. These students were identified as having little to no educational guidance.

**Access to Higher Education.** According to Swail (2000), access to higher education is an issue of social and cultural capital. The difficulty of providing college education to minority students is due to historical, racial and specific institution reasons (Jackson, 2012). When colleges were initially established in the U.S, the first to gain access to higher education were the White Anglo-Saxon protestant community (Clancy & Goastell, 2007; Webber & Boehmer, 2008). With addressing the issue of access to higher education it is important to acknowledge the continued effort for equality of admissions for Black students (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009; Heilig et al., 2010). In order to establish equality, there must be an approach to reduce the racial and ethnic achievement gap (Robinson, 2010). Within the school system Black students perform lower than their White counterparts at a national level and continue to exhibit lower

reading and math skills (Robinson, 2010; Marcenaro-Gutierrez, Galindo-Rueda, & Vignoles, 2007).

Challenges with educating children leads to unpredictable, unstable futures. Young Black Americans are much more likely to be incarcerated than to graduate from high school or college (Lindenmeyer, 2015). These individuals are prevented from achieving academic success. This is crucial because as reported by Bastedo and Gumport (2003), educational performance is essential to success in higher education. King (2009), identifies that barriers to access to higher education deals with the differences of cultural, linguistic, income and ability background.

There is a huge gap in the academic preparation received by White students compared to minority students (Jackson, 2012). This gap can cause issues with access to higher education. Most admission methods are based on test scores that create lower rates of admissions for minority students and higher rates for Whites (Jackson, 2012). Previous research indicates that standardized tests are important for the admission process in order to measure the different grades and academic standards of different schools (Wightman, 2000). Admission requirements such as standardized test and GPA are the best predictors for college success and persistence (Calvin, 2000; Sparkman, Maulding, & Roberts, 2012; Wightman, 2000; Alon, 2014). Although some individuals are in support of admission requirements, the suggestion that standardized test accurately measures learning outcomes is not universally accepted (Calvin, 2000). Individuals in favor of terminating the use of standardized tests believe these test are designed by White men with motives to keep their position of power, discriminating negatively towards different genders and ethnicities (Calvin, 2000). In an interview conducted by Matthews



(2003) with Wayne Camara, the vice president of research and development for the College Board he states when addressing the lack of bias in tests “It is the differences in the kinds of support they have in school and in the community and in the home” (p. 134). Test scores are not fully dependent upon the student’s inability to learn but more so dealing with the environment and lack of support minority students receive. Outside of Camara’s opinion, many Americans believe there is something wrong with the SAT and other standardized test (Matthews, 2003). Wightman (2000) argues that the significance of standardized testing should be lessened, and new admission requirements need to be provided to support all students.

The differences in test scores and grades are emphasizing the flaws and inequalities of the school system (Zwick, 2001; Alon, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Low test scores received by minority students are a reflection of socio-economic status and a lack of educational resources (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Wightman, 2000). As socio-economic status increase, test scores increase as well (Wightman, 2000). Students from wealthier backgrounds are likely to have achievement centered goals (Zwick, 2001); thus meaning these students test scores are likely higher. Black and Latino students typically score lower than Asian and White students on test, institutions admitting students based strictly on standardized testing, run the risk of having a less diverse population (Calvin, 2000; Zwick, 2001). In a study by the National Center for Education Statistics called "Making the Cut" examined a sample of 7,000 high school student’s college bound in 1992 from a national sample determining what percentage of students were eligible for college admission. The percentage of students with an SAT score of at

least 1100 were 28% Asians, 25% Whites, 8% Hispanics, and 3% Blacks. Results alike are used to argue that standardized test like the SAT are biased (Zwick, 2001).

According to Marcenaro-Gutierrez, Galindo-Rueda, and Vignoles (2010), student's lacking resources up until the age of 16, are likely not to attend higher education because they are not prepared. Jackson (2012), states that first generation students usually have disadvantages that causes them to have limited knowledge about college. First-generation students come to college less prepared academically (Longmire-Avital & Miller-Dyce, 2015). The academic achievement of students is closely related to their family's socio-economic status; for first-generation student's socio-economic status is an indicator of college enrollment and achievement of a college degree (Longmire-Avital & Miller-Dyce, 2015; Guiffrida, 2005). Most first-generation students come from low socio-economic backgrounds (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014); meaning these students are likely to have low academic success or low retention rates. According to Petty (2014), first-generation students have many obligations when attending college, students from low-income families may have to work while going to school to help support other responsibilities. Education is the most critical factor in obtaining social mobility for Black families (Longmire-Avital & Miller-Dyce, 2015).

Black men in American society have unique challenges before them (Gordon, Nichter & Henriksen, 2013). As stated earlier, Black males are more likely to go to prison, according to Smith and Zhang (2011), 39.8% of Black men are involved in the criminal system than enrolled in a college or university; thus creating a challenge for Black youths (Richardson, 2012). Growing up as a Black male, Watson (2015) had many doubts about higher education; he didn't think college was a goal and that he was not

academically prepared to go to college. These are thoughts that many Black males may have prior to attending college. Survival within their communities prior to college is a big enough challenge, let alone making it academically to be admitted.

Other barriers to higher education for students coming from a low socioeconomic background are the tuition fees. Tuition has continued to rise faster than family income and lower-income students tend to experience this challenge more than individuals with higher incomes (Webber & Boehmer, 2008). Conner and Rabovsky (2011), expressed that low-income students are usually in need of financial support to attend college. This information suggests that low-income students in need of financial assistance have a difficult time paying for tuition with increasing cost. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds educational attainment is impacted and they are less likely to complete a higher education degree (Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al., 2007; Swail, 2000). Parental education level influences their socioeconomic status thus influencing higher education participation and attainment for students (Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al., 2007).

In order to get these low-income students access to higher education, there must be an increase in supporting programs like Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Gear Up (Clancy & Goastell, 2007). Another program offered is the TRiO program, this program has helped hundreds of graduates from low-income families have an opportunity to receive a college degree (Lindenmeyer, 2015; King, 2009).

**Black Students Experiences at PWIs.** Although there has been an increase in African American students enrolled in higher education (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010), the amount of African American graduates at PWIs are lower (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). According to Museus (2008), more than half of minority students do not graduate within

six years, this is a result of minority students feeling like they don't belong in the culture of their college environment. Challenges that relate to low academic achievement for Black students are identified as poor college preparedness and financial issues (Greer & Brown, 2011). Other issues include Black students' feelings of faculty and the racial climate as hostile and discriminative (Karkouti, 2016; Keller, 1989). Having a disconnect from person and environment can increase an individual's level of stress (Greer & Brown, 2011).

PWIs have not been successful in supporting and keeping African American students (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). These students do not feel like they receive social support from faculty and staff on campus (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). Black faculty members usually have higher expectations of Black students (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Black students feel as though they have to invalidate stereotypes such as they are academically inferior, this conscious thought may create barriers for students throughout the PWI campus environment.

Motivation is necessary for students to get through the challenges experienced while in school. Rodgers and Summers (2008) stated "Many such students who experience an absence of internal motivation to attempt a task may also find themselves lacking sufficient external sources of efficacy and motivation" (p. 178). One important factor that is beneficial to Black college student success at PWIs are the student's relationship with families and friends (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Pidi & Smith, 2011). Families and friends are important because they help support the student when he/she may feel overwhelmed from the campus environment that may be different from back

home. Another factor important for Black college student achievement is involvement in Black student organizations (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010).

**Benefits of Higher Education.** Access to higher education for everyone is extremely important; education is beneficial to us all (Swail, 2000; Merisotis, 2005). Education truly guarantees an individual getting ahead in society; receiving a bachelor's degree or higher allows individuals to increase their social status (Swail, 2000). Some other benefits of higher education are lower unemployment rates, lower social welfare costs, higher voter turnout, increasing income and improved status (Merisotis, 2005). Data collected by Hensley, Galilee-Belfer, & Lee (2013) conveys that a college degree can improve individuals economic gain. College enrollment provides intellectual and social benefits (Hensley et al., 2013). For individuals to gain access to these benefits and higher education, ensuring greater access to minority students is the first step (Jackson, 2012). Being able to understand different race and ethnic education discrepancies is important especially due to the increasing diversity in the United States (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003). Another solution to higher education for minority students is to make admission standards broader (Jackson, 2012). A final solution for access to higher education is to encourage minority communities to accept responsibility for disciplining and supporting personal success (Jackson, 2012).

**Role Models for Black Men.** An important source of adolescent development is the establishment of personal relationships between youths and adults within a community (Richardson, 2012). These individuals can be considered role models for some of the youth. From a young age, our parents are considered to be the men and women responsible for teaching the best way to live (Carter, 2007). Outside of parental

guidance and influences from school, the media is another outlet for youths to look up to. Rarely do media display positive accomplishments of Black men, it is mostly consumed with negative stereotypes of Black people (Palmer & Maramba, 2011). Having both youths and parents involved in social community activities such as church, recreational centers, and sports provides access to adult role models who can have a positive influence on young people (Richardson, 2012). Youth sports for some young Black males may be the only opportunity to interact and build healthy relationships with adult Black men (Richardson, 2012). Richardson (2012), explains how Black male coaches play an important role in reducing crime for young at-risk Black students and inspire positive outcomes. Individuals such as these can influence positive growth and development in at-risk Black males (Richardson, 2012). These mentors may also play an important role in whether a young Black male chooses to go to college.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

The theories that can help to understand the experiences and development of Black male students include Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), Chickering and Reisser's Theory of Identity Development (1993), and Cross's Theory of Black Identity Development (2001). Schlossberg helps in understanding the transition process of the student and what he may be experiencing while attending college. Chickering and Reisser's Theory will give insight on what stage a student may be developmentally and how they can progress. Cross's theory will help to describe how an individual identifies as a Black student in society.

**Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory.** Schlossberg (1981), initially began to realize that people were concerned with how themselves and those around them were able to deal with change. Her original research showed that individuals differ in how they adapt to change. Schlossberg (1981), identified that it was not the transition itself that was important but how the transition related to the individual's stage, situation, and style at the time of the transition. Transitions are described by Schlossberg (1981), as events or non-events that result in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world, thus creating changes in one's behavior. The end of a transition usually ends with a stable new identity (Schlossberg, 1981). This theory provides information toward understanding the changes and challenges students may face during college that could have lasting effects (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010). Within this theory three types of transitions were developed: anticipated or planned, unanticipated or unplanned, and nonevents. The theory also talks about transition from four unique perspectives: situation, self, support, and strategies which were created to represent the transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

Some situations are results of individual's decisions, while other situations are based on unforeseen circumstances (Schlossberg, 1981). To understand this let's take into consideration the experiences of a Black male student transitioning to college for the first time. Coming to college for this young man was likely a planned event, which means he is likely to be better prepared. This also means he is likely to change social roles and adapt to the college environment better than a peer who is coming from a background that has not fully prepared him to be at the college.

The self includes personal and demographic characteristics related to how an individual views their life and psychological resources which aids in coping (Schlossberg, 1981). If the same Black male student comes in to college well prepared and with high confidence, he is more likely to view his environment as manageable and has the ability to cope with stressful issues. This individual is also more likely to approach situations they face with a greater level of satisfaction and confidence. However, if we have another Black male student who does not feel prepared for college, is coming from a lower socioeconomic status, and is away from home and friends for the first time, they may lack the confidence in themselves and their abilities which may impact their class work and overall success at the institution.

Support is described as intimate relationships, family, friends, and the institution and community made available to help reinforce students of any doubts they may have (as cited in Evans et al., 2010). Students with these support systems will have an easier time transitioning due to having people available to vent or confide in, or seek guidance from during different situations. Students who do not have such individuals available can only rely on themselves to work out their own issues. If support lacks, there is really no base of communication the student has to assist them through this difficult process. A student who comes in to college may also be ill-prepared to be there, but may be part of a program where he will receive a great deal of support and thus find success.

Strategies is the final perspective described by Schlossberg (1981) and occurs when an individual is able to realize that the situation they are in needs to be addressed and their current situation needs to be modified (as cited in Evans et al., 2010). The student who plans to come to college, and has the full support from family and friends,



and is confident in their abilities will be more likely to use resources provided by the institution. However, the student who is coming in less prepared, perhaps a first generation student, with low self-awareness will be less likely to reach out for support or use campus resources. Individuals with access to the previous three S's may not exhibit any issues with developing strategies to assist with developmental or transitioning issues.

**Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Theory of Identity Development.** Chickering was a professor at Goddard College where he began to evaluate how students were being impacted developmentally while in college (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). He began to assess the students he was working with through the use of instruments like personality inventories and achievement tests along with asking students to journal their experiences in college (Evans, et al., 2010). This original research was conducted with White males in their sophomore and senior years. From this he first developed his original theory on college student identity development. Later, Chickering and Reisser partnered up to conduct similar research with a broader population of students and revised the original work (Evans, et al. 2010). Chickering and Reisser (1993) targeted university administrators, faculty, and student professional practitioners in their explanations of student development. The intention of the theory was to help explain policies, practices, leadership activities and institutional norms through the seven vectors created within the theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The seven vectors created are developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Each vector will be examined to

fully understand challenges Black males may face while attending any source of higher education.

***Developing Competence.*** Vector one, developing competency, has three types of competencies that are developed in college, the intellectual, physical and manual, and interpersonal (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), intellectual competency is a developed skill using one's mind; physical and manual competency could be considered as athletic or artistic achievement, and gaining strength, fitness, and self-discipline; and interpersonal competency is gaining listening and communication skills. Individuals are able to gain skills in specific fields and become more well-rounded figures in society. A Black male coming to college may feel out of place and need to develop a sense of competency in a variety of ways. He may feel ill-prepared academically and need assistance in learning how to budget his time and energy toward his school work. As he receives positive grades he will feel more competent and may see achievement of competency in other areas.

***Managing Emotions.*** Vector two, examines how individuals are able to appropriately display and recognize emotions (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In order to fully develop within this vector, students have to first identify their emotions and then learn how to appropriately channel their negative emotions in a positive way before affecting relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). For a Black male coming to college he may experience a wide range of emotions including: excitement, fear, anxiety, confidence, just to name a few. Black male students, especially at a PWI may feel like they don't belong. He does not have many peers or faculty that look like him and he will be on the receiving end of many microaggressions during his time at the institution. This

may lead to feelings of anger and acting out on these feelings by becoming distant from academics and spending more time surrounding himself with those of the same ethnicity. His grades will begin to reflect his actions until he realizes that he must find outlets to deal with his emotions. Learning how to appropriately display these emotions will take time and experience.

***Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence.*** Vector three, occurs when students are able to take responsibility for themselves and care less about the opinions of others or require a great deal of guidance (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In order to achieve interdependence, one must have emotional and instrumental independence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), emotional independence is lacking the need of reassurance, affection, and approval from others, and instrumental independence has two major components, the ability to solve problems and the ability to be adaptable. A Black man in college will feel isolated and insecure within the new college environment. It will take him some time to feel confident with his new location and himself. He will likely stay to himself or stay with those he feels safe around, until he becomes engaged in his environment. This will take time, but when accomplished he will learn to ask for assistance when he needs it or find himself needing less support from administrators and has likely found his interdependence.

***Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships.*** Individuals in vector four are working toward developing tolerance and appreciation for other's differences and in this develop a new found appreciation for intimacy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students in this stage are gaining awareness and experiences through a willingness to learn. Through this they begin to decrease biases and ethnocentrism as well as increase empathy

for diversity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Black men in college, once comfortable with their surroundings will begin to engage with those outside of their race. He will be tolerant of their differences initially but later will gain a true sense of appreciation for these differences, and with this develop a new found appreciation for intimacy.

***Establishing Identity.*** Vector five, is the culmination of all the previous vectors toward establishing the individual's identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Establishing identity involves seven factors: comfort with body appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural way, clarification of self-concept through life roles, self-acceptance and self-esteem, and personal stability and integration (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Once a student is able to identify oneself in all aspects of their identity, a solid sense of self emerges (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Like anyone going through new experiences and college transitions, people will explore and try to understand their identity. Black male college students will have to find out how they will recognize or display their cultural identity in social settings. Through gaining autonomy and interpersonal relationships, they will develop and grow confident with their new established identity.

***Developing Purpose.*** Vector six, is developed when an individual becomes intentional about their interests and goals and are able to persist even when faced with obstacles (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Within this stage in our lives we discover what we love to do, what our talents are, and what our full potential for excellence is (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). A Black male college student will first have to become confident with himself and his surroundings before he is confident with his purpose. He will question what his life means, what he wants to do with this life, how he can help his

family, how to deal with the various worries he is feeling. As he becomes more confident with his own abilities and skills he will begin to identify what he wants to pursue, and he will develop his purpose.

*Developing Integrity.* Vector seven, is closely related to establishing identity and developing purpose; individuals develop their core values and beliefs which creates a foundation for how individuals interpret experiences (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Developing integrity, involves three stages, humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), “humanizing values is shifting away from automatic application of uncompromising beliefs and using principled thinking in balancing one’s own self-interest with the interests of one’s fellow human beings, personalizing values is consciously affirming core values and beliefs while respecting other points of view, and developing congruence is matching personal values with socially responsible behavior” (p. 51). After the Black male college student has established his identity, relationships and goals, he will establish and live by his own values and beliefs. He will, with his college experience, be more open to others opinions and perspectives and not feel threatened by different perspectives. He will thus, become a well-rounded member of society.

**Cross (2001) Theory of Black Identity Development.** In an effort to understand Black identity development Cross conducted research and identified six sectors to explain the nigrescence patterns of individuals across the life span; nigrescence is the process of being Black (as cited in Cross, 1991). “Nigrescence offers a chance to examine, at a detailed and even intimate level, what happens to a person during identity change”

(Cross, 1991, p. 147). The six sectors included in this model are infancy and childhood in early Black identity development, preadolescence, adolescence, early adulthood, adult nigrescence and nigrescence recycling (as cited in Evans et al., 2010). The sector that best helps understand the experiences of Black male college students is sector five adult nigrescence. The several previous sectors provide a background on how students may develop and what they may experience prior to college that affects their current identity.

Sector five, adult nigrescence, includes four stages pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization/internalization commitment (Cross, 1991). Pre-encounter includes low-race-salience; receiving little knowledge from parents about being Black; and internalized racism (as cited in Evans et al., 2010). This stage “depicts the identity to be changed” (Cross, 1991, p. 158). If Black male students have negative pre-encounters such as internalized racism, it can affect the way students communicate with other races and ethnicities, not to mention with those of the Black male’s same race. Encounter describes “a personal experience that temporarily dislodges someone from his or her old world view and identity, thus making the person vulnerable to conversion” (Cross, 1991, p. 159). The Black male student through constant engagement will become more willing to connect with others outside of their racial identity and become comfortable with this action.

Immersion refers to Black individuals developing a pro-Black mentality and opposing White culture. Emersion occurs when previous thoughts of opposing White culture develop and the individual experiences a true understanding of their Black identity (as cited in Evans et al., 2010). Immersion described by Cross (1991), “depicts behavior of someone who has “just discovered Blackness,” as manifested in the

construction of the “correct” ideology and world view, glorification of African heritage, either/or thinking, Blacker-than-thou attitudes, unrealistic expectations concerning the efficacy of Black Power, a tendency to denigrate White people and White culture, and a preoccupation with proving that, as seen by “others,” one is Black enough” (p. 159).

Black males in the immersion stage will be more secluded, not feeling comfortable amongst his White counterparts. Individuals with this discomfort will have an extremely hard time focusing and succeeding in school and may become distant from White classmates, faculty, and staff.

The emersion stage best integrates students from all ethnicities, it allows Black students to feel confident in their identity and actively learn about others (Cross, 1991). Internalization has three perspectives of an individual, a Black nationalist, bicultural, and multicultural (as cited in Evans et al., 2010). Black nationalist is committed to advocating for the Black communities and Black males in this stage may actively engage in groups of all Black students where they can hold leadership positions and help in educating their Black peers. Bicultural individuals combine their Black identity with the identity of the dominant culture. A Black male in the bicultural perspective may join groups that are predominately Black, but also may join groups that are diverse or find ways to engage other groups to create educational opportunities. The Black male in the multicultural perspective focuses on other cultures identity as well as their Black identity. A Black male in a bicultural perspective will find ways to assimilate within the dominant population surrounding him, but will still feel confident about his own race, and know what it means to him. An individual reaches the emersion stage when “the person’s emotions level off, and psychological defensiveness is replaced by affective and

cognitive openness, allowing the person to be more critical in his or her analysis” (Cross, 1991, p.159). Depending on the experiences the Black male college student has and how he identifies himself, he will act out on these behaviors and it will become a part of his identity.

Internalization and internalization-commitment occurs once an individual has successfully experienced the stages of nigrescence. Cross (1991), describes the person at this stage having shifted from the insecure and anxious moments of early conversion to confidence on personal standards of Blackness’ from uncontrolled rage toward White people and a perception of them as a distinct and evil biologic group, to controlled anger toward systems of oppression and injustice and racist institutions; from symbolic rhetoric to quiet, dedicated, long-term commitment; from unrealistic urgency to a sense of destiny; from anxious, insecure, rigid, inferiority feelings to Black pride, self-love, and a deep sense of Black communalism (p. 159).

A Black male student at this stage has successfully become a well-rounded individual, secure with his culture within the world surrounding him. He will be comfortable engaging with any ethnicity, still feeling confident with his Black identity. He will be more willing to reach out to faculty, and more willing to become a leader for his Black community.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the history of Black male students in higher education was examined. It provides insight in to the challenges Black male students face as they enter college and along with how prepared they are to take on the journey of higher education. There is a lack of access and preparation that Black male students encounter that hinders



their success, however some do still succeed. With this chapter, we begin to understand the challenges the Black male undergraduate experiences in choosing to go to college. In chapter three, further information will be provided to address the method of study performed, the population and its importance, as well as type of instruments used for analysis.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

This chapter will address methods used to understand the path to higher education for Black men. The intent was to gather perceptions of Black men on why they attend college, what obstacles they face in higher education, and their transitions throughout their college experiences. The sections discussed in this chapter include design of study, participants, site, instrument, data collection, treatment of data, and data analysis. All sections give further descriptions of how the study was organized and how the study was performed.

#### **Design of Study**

A qualitative method was selected for this study, Merriam (1998), described qualitative research as “an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (p. 5). The main concept in qualitative research is to understand the experience from the participants’ point of view and not the researchers (Merriam, 1998). One on one interviews were conducted to get insight on the experiences of accessing higher education through a Black man’s point of view. Further, a narrative method of sharing the data is provided to share the students’ personal stories and experiences. The data collected was coded and compared for commonalities.

#### **Participants**

Four second year college students starting their fall semester were selected. This purposeful sample was utilized to obtain the perspective of students who recently persisted through their first year in college. Their fresh memories were helpful in

acquiring a full understanding of the access and transition to higher education for young Black men. The Office of Minority Affairs was contacted to provide a list of Black male students who had completed their first year of college and had continued on to their second year. This office is a resource of the institution to support and provide programs that will enhance the knowledge and success of minority students. Four participants from the requested list were randomly selected to get various opinions to support research. The participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity, Michael, Derek, Anthony, and James. Below is a brief description of each participant:

Michael is a sophomore male from the suburbs of Chicago. He attended a private elementary school and a public high school. He has aspirations of becoming a military officer. Derek is a sophomore male from the south side of Chicago. He attended public elementary schools and a college preparatory high school. He is currently majoring in English Education with hopes of becoming an English teacher. Anthony is a sophomore male from the south side of Chicago. He attended a public elementary and high school, and was involved in a few sports. He is determined to graduate from college like most of his family members. James is a sophomore male from the west side of Chicago. He grew up in a gang affiliated neighborhood, despite this challenge he decided to attend a public high school in a different community than his neighborhood. He is involved in several sports currently in college and is majoring in Sports Management with a minor in business.

### **Site**

This study was conducted at a mid-sized, rural, Midwestern, university with a total enrollment of 8,520 students as of fall 2015. The total number of Black students

enrolled during fall 2015 were 1,441, with the total of Black male students representing less than half ( $n = 548$ ). Seventy-five percent of students from fall 2014 to fall 2015 were retained with the graduation rate in 2009 at 58%.

### **Instrument**

I the researcher, was the primary instrument for this qualitative study, I was responsible for gathering and analyzing data and to collect and produce important information (Merriam, 1998). One on one interviews were conducted to listen, observe, and connect with the participants. The interview protocol (Appendix A), were carefully designed to influence participants to speak about certain aspects of their transition. Each participant completed an informed consent document as part of the interview process.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected through one on one interviews which were audio recorded. Participants were fully informed about the study before participating in the interview. A secure location was selected for all participants, allowing them to feel safe and comfortable. The individuals participating signed a consent form that allowed their responses to be used within the study. Each interview was transcribed and reviewed in order to identify the unique college experiences.

### **Treatment of Data**

Data collected from the interviews were stored safely on a password protected computer owned by the researcher. Transcriptions of the interview were saved on the computer and only viewed by the researcher and the thesis advisor. All information and treatment of data were conducted within the IRB policies. A journal was kept by the

researcher about what was learned through interviews and personal experiences to prevent bias views.

### **Data Analysis**

The four sophomore students were numbered and color coded to identify differences and to support confidentiality. Interview transcripts were coded by identifying reoccurring themes, that were then compared for similarities that builds relationships between participants and their experiences (Saldana, 2015). Following the initial coding, further themes were identified as secondary codes, that is themes within initially identified codes (Saldana, 2015). Because this is a narrative study each participant interview was reviewed independently and an outline was developed to provide some consistency in writing chapter four. This allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the research which will be addressed in chapters four and five.

### **Summary**

Above, is a description of the process performed for the study. Four students were randomly selected and interviewed. The interview was recorded in a secure location at a midsized, rural, Midwestern, university, on a password protected lap top. The coded transcription was used to identify relationships among participants to better understand the experiences of the selected young Black men. Chapter four will provide a narrative of the participants' journey. The examination of these stories will allow readers to secure a better understanding of their perceptions and detailed descriptions of their experiences; thus, providing insight on individuals whose experiences are often misunderstood. Chapter five will provide an analysis of the four narratives.

## Chapter IV

### Narratives

This chapter gives a detailed description of the students' narratives. The purpose of this chapter is to better understand the experiences of Black male students by using the participants' own words and unique perspectives. To comprehend how these men gained access to college and transitioned to a PWI their stories of family, neighborhood growing up, elementary and high school experience, college preparation, and college transition will be shared. Below four individual narratives will be written to understand each journey.

#### Michael

**Family.** Michael is a first-generation student in his second year of college. Growing up he lived with his mother, older sister, little brother, and nephew. Michael was responsible for caring for his little brother and nephew prior to coming to college, "taking care of my brother was a lot and then my sister's son which was kind of like my little brother was a lot too because my mom worked a lot and my dad helped but he was never there." His mother went to college but stopped going because she had children. His father didn't go to college; he was a truck driver and separated from his mother when Michael was 13. Around this age and through high school Michael worked at his cousin's daycare where his mother also worked, their family was very close and everyone helped in watching after his nephew and younger brother. Michael's family looked up to him and he shared "they put me on a pedestal, everybody always look up to me, I'm not going to say I don't like it, but sometimes I feel like it's unnecessary."

**Neighborhood Growing Up.** Michael lived in the south suburbs of Chicago, a large metropolitan area. He moved back and forth between two major suburbs throughout his pre-college years. He never played with the other kids on his block growing up and instead spent time with his cousins who were much older than him. He explained “I never really hung out in the streets until high school and I got in a lot of trouble.” On hanging out with his older cousins he shared, “I acted older than a lot of people, so I never hung out with people my age, they would bring me around parties and we would just hang out, and that kind of affected me growing up.”

**Elementary and High School Experience.** Michael attended a private school from kindergarten until eighth grade, which provided little exposure to diverse ethnicity. His elementary education also taught him how to be disciplined, both academically and personally. Michael shared that the principal of his school “had a paddle and he used to touch some.” He expressed that he felt like his elementary education was academically tougher and stated “me going through a private school made public school so easy that I didn’t really even try, I would do homework at school, so once I got out I would just be in the streets.” This disciplined behavior helped him as he transitioned to high school where he was in the top ten in his class of about 400 students. He talked about taking difficult courses like honors chemistry and biology, but he could pass them. He typically did things on his own and his family would praise him and support him when needed.

Michael talked about how in his private school he was more likely to receive assistance from teachers than at his public school. In describing his time in high school, he stated “If you don’t say anything they don’t care they kind of push you through, that’s really the only challenging thing, everything else was pretty easy.” Although there was a

lack of teacher support in high school, during this time he was an obedient student and his teachers were fond of him; going to school was very important and his mother would hardly allowed him to miss school. Involvement in extracurricular activities was not an option for Michael, he talked about how it would have benefitted his high school experience, but had to watch his brother and nephew so he did not have an opportunity to get involved. Even though he was not involved he considered high school to be very easy and even referred to it as a “cakewalk,” this lack of stimulation made him choose not to go to college right after high school.

**College Awareness.** Michael was first introduced to college his senior year in high school. The high school he attended pushed the students towards getting serious in school and applying to colleges. The counselors spent time with the students giving them specific individual attention depending on their interest. Michael’s mother expected him to go to college stating

College was expected, we had a conversation and she would say, “well you are going to college or you are going somewhere.” We never really sat down and like explained the step by step; and she didn’t know how to do FAFSA and all that stuff so I was kind of winging it.

In preparation for applying to college he spoke about having to take the ACT twice, the first time he scored a 19 and the second time he received a 21.

As previously discussed, Michael was rather close with his extended family. So when we talked about family members who have gone to college he spoke of cousins. Within his family, Michael has some family members who attempted and graduated from college. One family member that is very influential to Michael is his cousin, whom he



described as changing drastically while attending college. He went from being a wild person to the president of his fraternity organization on campus. Michael identified his cousin as one of the only people that motivates him about college to this day. Michael applied to a total of three colleges, all in locations where he had family nearby or close to the area of the school. He did not go to any college tours or fairs and feels like he was not prepared for college and instead just showed up to college.

**College Experience.** Michael shared that his girlfriend influenced his decision to attend college at the institution he is currently at. As previously stated, Michael did not come to college straight from high school, instead he choose to enter the military.

I was fresh out of basic training and I was used to getting up, and then I started getting used to civilian life and that messed up everything, I stopped waking up for class to go to the military ROTC class and then I failed that class but ended up passing everything else, it wasn't until my second semester when I got too comfortable and was missing classes and everything just got out of hand.

In addition to having a difficult academic transition, he also lived on campus without a roommate, so he had little exposure to the campus culture,

that was a bad idea, it took the college experience away, but I had a girlfriend who was like a senior and had an apartment [off-campus], so I used to go over there all the time and would just go to the dorm to get clothes.

Although Michael did not have many friends at the institution, he had one friend outside of his girlfriend with whom he had attended private elementary school. This friend got him out of his comfort zone and acclimated to the social college experience.

As Michael, stated above his academic experience was challenging because he started to attend class less and less and then he was failing classes and dropping classes that were too challenging for him. He did not participate in study groups or reach out to get tutoring when necessary for certain classes. He experienced stress not only with the classes he was taking but also with the military commitments he had, going back and forth to Chicago, working a job at UPS, and maintaining a relationship with his girlfriend. During these stressful times, being a spiritual person, Michael would turn to God, or family like his mom, dad, or cousin. Michael had gotten to the point where he wanted to give up and stop going to school but he received motivation from his mother to stay, “my friends called my mom and told her I was thinking about quitting school and she got on the phone and cursed me out so bad, and then my cousin was coming down to see how it is and I didn’t want him to come down and find out I haven’t been in school and lying to everybody.” He ultimately stayed in school based off those connections and obligations.

### **Derek**

**Family.** Derek is a first generation, sophomore student, majoring in English Education. Derek has several siblings from his mother and father separately and of those siblings Derek and one of his sisters were the first to attend a four-year university and are currently in school together at the same time. Both of his parents were on drugs and at a young age Derek was adopted by his grandmother. His father growing up was in and out of the house and his mother was not around.

**Neighborhood Growing Up.** As a child Derek moved quite a bit around the city of Chicago, Illinois, “My childhood experience was, I wouldn’t say rocky, but my granny moved three different times, so that was three different grammar schools that I went to.” Each elementary school was in the neighborhood he moved into. The last location Derek moved to was on the south side of Chicago. The neighborhood was predominantly White, “there were some Black people but not as many [...] it was a pretty good neighborhood.” Derek and his family would participate in activities in the neighborhood such as block parties and bond with each other.

**Elementary and High School Experience.** Derek went to three public elementary schools growing up. He was on the honor roll from sixth grade until his freshman year in high school and then on the honor roll again his sophomore year until he graduated. Derek went to a college preparatory high school that was connected to one of the colleges in Chicago. Derek was very active in high school, “with my friends, we participated in a lot of school activities, yearbook, student government” and class newspaper. He talked about his aspirations of wanting to become a lawyer and how that quickly changed when he realized how much work it would take.

Derek was involved in tutoring programs where he met his mentor who helped and supported him throughout high school. He still has a connection with his mentor and her partner, “they were my support group, they would come to report card pick up when my granny couldn’t pick me up and they’re still supportive as of now.” Derek also received support from his family, specifically his sister and grandmother.

**College Awareness.** As previously stated, Derek went to a college preparatory high school that prepared him for college,

I feel like my high school really prepared us well because our high school was connected with [urban] college so we did like a lot of classes over there, and it was more like about the importance of learning in college, and like how D2L is used here, we used another site called turnitin.com for papers and it was always due by 11:59.

Derek was first introduced to college in eighth grade, he was talked to about high school and college and would go to both high school and college fairs. Derek talked about how the school discussed the importance of college and would say “high school is great but college is the mission.” The students were exposed to college preparation early in high school by taking seminar classes and creating personal statements that were updated yearly.

Derek talked about family members going to college. His father went to college but did not complete his degree, his cousin who he looks up to earned her degree and is now in law school. When discussing his connection to his cousin Derek expressed my cousin used to go to this school and graduated, I was going to go to [urban southern college] to go to school but I decided to go to school here; I look up to my cousin because we kind of had the same struggles, her mother did drugs, her father did drugs, my mother and father did drugs, so I feel like with all that going on, she still was able to love her momma and she came to school and pledged in a sorority and became captain or president.

In preparation for school, Derek applied to 10 different colleges. He received free waivers for the college applications and had a specific class he took that assisted with the applying process. Derek took the ACT three different times getting an 18, 20, then 21.

**College Experience.** Derek shared that his high school prepared him adequately for college but personally he was not ready, “I cried the first time I got here, but then after a week the school was small too, just like high school, so I got adjusted to it, but I was very nervous, I didn’t really talk to anybody.” Derek was involved in a special admittance program at the institution, which restricted him from being involved in any extracurricular activities, “I feel like it was more like I didn’t really have any freedom or did anything I wanted to do, it was more about requirements, you have to work, go to study table hours, and go to class.” During his sophomore year, he got released from a provisional program and got involved in school activities, “I’m involved in a lot of stuff, I’m in BSU, NAACP, the English club, and the University Board for main stage committee.”

Derek did not have a roommate both his freshman and sophomore year. He gained most of his friends through the special admittance program, he even made friends through the friendships of his cousin that previously attended the institution. Derek did not need much outside assistance with completing his school work, but he did get tutored for his tougher classes. While talking about stress in college, Derek expressed how having multiple responsibilities from different organizations and meeting homework deadlines were stressful, he had to learn how to create a work life balance. During these stressful times, he turned to conversations on the phone with family or eating popcorn and watching the Disney channel. Derek did not face any obstacles attending or returning to a PWI, his high school was diverse so he talked about his college transition as being easily achieved.

**Anthony**

**Family.** Anthony is a sophomore in college. He is the only son with three sisters. Anthony's father does not live with him but he is still involved in his life. At home he lives with his mother and younger sister who is in high school; his other sister graduated from college and moved. Anthony spent time with his family going to family reunions, movies, and even grocery shopping together.

**Neighborhood Growing Up.** Anthony grew up on the south side of Chicago. He described the neighborhood as once being considered "historic," but currently has strong gang affiliation. He described his neighborhood by saying:

I'm right in the middle of a gang affiliated neighborhood, I'm used to the neighborhood so it really doesn't bother me, I know the neighborhood like the back of my hand but I am still cautious because it's, you know, gang affiliated. It's dangerous but I'm used to it.

As a child, Anthony recalled enjoying typical activities like going outside with friends, going to the park, and being involved in summer programs.

**Elementary and High School.** Anthony went to an all-boys urban preparatory high school. In describing his high school experience, he said "I didn't really have an experience because I went to an all-boys school, so I didn't have the typical high school experience." Anthony was involved in a few sports because he enjoyed playing them. He kept a B average throughout high school until his senior year when he started to procrastinate and "not even do work," but still managed to pass his classes and graduate. Anthony did not speak much about his elementary experience; his work ethic was about the same until his lack of motivation during his senior year in high school.

**College Awareness.** Anthony received preparation in high school for college.

When talking about school he shared,

It made me disciplined, we had this saying, “to be on time is to be early, to be early is to be on time,” so they kind of brain washed that in our head. To be on time for class every day, do our work, dress responsible, and stay focused.

Anthony was first introduced to the idea of college in elementary school. He talked about having a class that focused on college preparation and about his mother talking to him about college. Anthony is no stranger to the idea of college; his father attempted college but did not earn a degree and his mother and sister both graduated from college. He looked up to these same individuals who supported him through high school and college preparation. Anthony took the ACT twice first scoring a 19 then a 20. He spoke about attending college tours and fairs that helped him know what to expect. He applied to several different colleges with assistance from his counselors and remembered the process as being extremely long with “tons of paperwork.” His sister was very influential during the college application process, having just recently graduated from college she prepared him for what to expect while in school.

**College Experience.** Anthony first came to college living with a roommate he did not know. He had some friends from high school going into college and met more friends around campus, he mentioned, “I’m open to hanging out with new people, it’s just unintentional that the people I hang out with are predominately Black.” Anthony was involved in sports like intramurals during his freshman year. As a freshman, he took general education courses that he did well in until he started slacking off like he had done during his senior year in high school. He did not participate in study groups and relied on

friends for help in class, sharing “my pride gets in the way of asking for help, I feel like I can do it on my own and that gets me in a lot of messed up situations, it works sometimes but other times it does not.” Anthony talked about being stressed while in school. Not only was he concerned about not passing his classes but also with a relationship that he was involved in. During these stressful times he relies on his parents and sister for support and good advice. Anthony returned to school consecutively his second year, there was nothing that could have prevented him from coming back. When asked why he returned to college he said

to graduate, to get my diploma, I don't like starting something and not finishing. I've always had the mindset that I was going to graduate college because pretty much everyone in my family went to college and graduated, so I want to get my diploma.

### **James**

**Family.** James is a first-generation sophomore student majoring in sports management with a minor in business. He has a total of six brothers and sisters, four boys and two girls being the middle child. James comes from a single-parent household with his mother; his older brother plays the male role model because his father was not present. He helped to watch his younger brother and sister at times when he did not have sport obligations. James' family is extremely important to him and his biggest support team. He shared

my mom was always there, my brothers they wanted me to do good so they kept me off of the streets, even though they were on the streets, they supported me with school, my sister, everybody supported me in my family.



Outside of family support, James had his coaches support throughout high school and in present day.

**Neighborhood Growing Up.** James grew up on the west side of Chicago. There was a lot of gang activity in the neighborhood and his older brothers did not graduate from high school as a result of gang involvement. When talking about his environment he stated “It’s not the best neighborhood, but I wouldn’t move from there if I had the option because it kind of built me into the person I am today.” Growing up on the west side James had to adapt to his environment,

the everyday lifestyle of living on the west side of Chicago is part of growing up, like waking up you have to walk 10 blocks versus five blocks because you have to walk a certain route to avoid walking in someone else’s neighborhood... you have to duck and dodge people and be aware of where you’re at or what colors you’re wearing or what you say.

He shared how the neighborhood has steadily gone downhill,

as of right now in Chicago, I think we are at 600 homicides already since January and so with over like a five year period I probably lost about 25 close friends, I had a rough childhood but you just got to stay focused and try to turn things like that into motivation to make it out.

**Elementary and High School.** At a young age James learned about the importance of education. While in elementary school, he failed the sixth grade, when talking about him failing he expressed “that was like a wakeup call, basically you live and you learn, I was young and realized that school was important and that’s when I started to focus on school.” Around this time James became extremely involved in

baseball, football, and other sports when he found time to play them. His enjoyment of sports continued into his high school years where in addition to the other sports he began running track as well.

During his childhood and teen years James shared that he was in a gang and involved in gang related activity. Due to his involvement, James made the decision to have his mother transfer him to a different high school on the other side of town. He gave his mother an ultimatum to allow him to transfer schools or he would not go to school at all, "I realized it was too many people that I knew and if I would have stayed, I would not have graduated." James soon learned the result of gang involvement is "either death or going to jail" and realized that is not what he wanted for his life. Sports are what kept James off the streets and provided him with a way to be disciplined.

In high school James was average academically, typically receiving a B or a C. He did not find the academics challenging, it was more difficult for him to arrive on time to school, because of the distance he had to travel. While in high school the principle appointed him vice president of a school organization called Men of Valor due to his great leadership qualities and involvement.

**College Awareness.** James was first introduced to the idea of college in eight grade from one of his coaches. His coach talked about him saying he "has the potential to play college ball." James shared that "he saw the potential in me, he was saying even if I don't play college ball I still had to go to college and get a degree." James inspiration prior to coming to college was from his mother and coaches. He talked about his mother "I looked up to my mother a lot, and I still do to this day, I don't know how she did it on her own." His mother did not graduate from high school and recently accomplished

receiving a degree in General Education Development (GED). Outside of James' coaches that earned a college degree, he has no family members that graduated from college. As a child, college was never talked about and James did not know any college graduates. It was not until high school that James had courses available to him to learn more about college.

James took a class in high school called "One Goal" that assisted students with applying to college and educated them on what to expect. James while searching for colleges inquired about the location, financial aid, track programs, and available majors. He did not go on any college tours but went to college fairs to satisfy requirements. While applying for colleges James received assistance from his teachers in his "One Goal" class that taught him how to apply and taught him things to know about financial aid. James applied to about 10 colleges and got accepted to most of the institutions. James shared that he had scored a 16 on his ACT.

**College Experience.** James lived on campus his first year, and his roommate was a student that attended high school with him. James completed his first semester with a B average, he talked about how his transition to college was difficult because he had to learn how to manage his time and prioritize. Some of his classes that first year were difficult and he did not reach out for outside assistance and instead figured things out on his own. Most of James friends were met through sports and the others through his jobs at the gym and as a Resident Assistant (RA). Coming to a PWI, James shared that this is a new experience for him being exposed to an environment with majority White people.

James is heavily involved in extracurricular activities at school and had as stated previously a B average, despite his involvement he does not like school, he shared

the only thing that keeps me going is my mother, I do everything for my mother, I have three older brothers and a father that taught me what not to do. I have a little brother and sister, so I try to lead by example.

While in school James experienced stress not by school work but by the concern of his family back home. He is often worried about their health and safety and usually copes with these feelings by calling back home regularly to check on his family. When asked why he returned to his second year of college he replied,

to show kind of with the race thing, that people think because you're Black you're going to drop out. So basically, me being a RA, running track, and doing all this extra stuff, shows people that we can do the exact same thing other races can do, that's why I really do it.

### **Summary**

In chapter four the participants' narratives were told by using specific quotes and details from their interview. The purpose of describing their stories is to provide readers with a perspective of the journey each of the Black men have taken to college.

Examining each man's family, neighborhood growing up, elementary and high school education, college awareness, and college experience, helps in understanding where the influence to go to college comes from and what motivates them to successfully receive their degrees. In chapter five an analysis will be provided on how Black men access higher education.

## Chapter V

### Analysis

The purpose of the study was to examine what leads Black men to higher education. This chapter presents the findings from data collected from four African American sophomore men on their perception of college awareness, access to college, and the transition to a PWI. Data for the study was obtained through interviews. The research questions used to guide the study and used in the analysis process were (a) What influences Black men to attend college? (b) What challenges are Black men facing getting admitted to higher education? (c) What obstacles do Black men identify in transitioning to a Predominately White Institution (PWI)?

#### **Influences for Black Men to Attend College**

When discussing what guided these individuals to go to college, the participants identified several different people and experiences influencing their decision. These influences included family, coaches, and mentors, their neighborhoods, and elementary or high school education experiences. All influences will be explored in detail to understand the participant's experiences. This will provide a better understanding as to what influences these young men to attend college.

**Family.** The participants in this study all talked about having some type of support and influence from their family, more specifically mothers, siblings, and cousins. Michael talked about his cousin that graduated from college, "he, to this day still helps me and texts me encouraging words." Michael also expressed how his mother wanted him to go to college, and this influenced him to apply to some schools. Anthony expressed "I really relied on my sister because she had just graduated from college," he

also had assistance from his mother who initially brought up the idea of college. Derek spoke about his cousins graduating from college and being role models which influenced him to attend the same institution, “I look up to them because we had the same struggles, her mother and father were on drugs, my mother and father were on drugs, she still was able to love her mother and came to school.” James talked about how his brothers looked after him “they wanted me to do good so they kept me off the streets, even though they were on the streets they supported me with school.”

Mothers were talked about by these participants, as having the greatest influence toward deciding to come to college. Three of the four participants talked about conversations with their mother about college or how there was an expressed understanding that college was the plan. The fathers of these participants were either absent or supportive but not living in the household. Derek was one of the four participants who mentioned having an estranged relationship with his mother. He talked about how he still loves her and works hard despite his relationship. James spoke about wanting to do better for his mother and to help others the way his coaches have helped him, sharing

I want to give back to my mother because she spent so much time raising me so I want to look after her and make sure she’s fine, when my coaches help me out when they don’t have to, when they text looking out for me, I want to do the same thing for someone else.

In this statement, James was talking about helping his community and family back home with the benefits gained from a college education.

**Coaches/Mentors.** Two of the four participants mentioned having a connection with a mentor or coach that helped them in some way during their education. Derek had mentors available to him in elementary school, his mentors were able to help him not only with academics but with personal obligations; when talking about his mentors he said “they’re still supportive as of now.” James talked about his elementary and high school coaches being the only people he knew of that went to college. The first time hearing about college was from his eighth grade coach, “He saw potential in me and he said even if you don’t play college ball, you still have to go to college.”

Often, these men did not have positive adult influences and had to depend on themselves. One of the participants James expressed having people look up to him, as he was appointed vice president of the Men of Valor group at his high school, “I was appointed to that position by the principal because I guess he saw me as a leader, so I was kind of like a role model to the whole school, showing that it’s okay to be different.” James viewed himself as a role model to his peers and those who wanted to follow in his footsteps. No participants directly indicated having self-motivation as a factor of college enrollment, but they all described wanting to do better for themselves and create a better life.

**Neighborhoods.** All four participants were from the city of Chicago. They all were from different areas and two of the four participants explained having similar environments. Anthony referred to his neighborhood as being “gang affiliated” and that he had to be “cautious” while in the environment. James had a similar experience and described his neighborhood as being “pretty rough.” He explained how both he and his brothers were involved in gang activities, “it’s not the best neighborhood, but I wouldn’t

move from there if I had the option to because it kind of built me into the person I am today.” James explained how being in a bad environment “turned into motivation to make it out.”

The other two participants had different experiences growing up in their neighborhoods. Derek expressed living in a predominantly White neighborhood, and he talked about how this experience prepared him for attending a PWI. He explained that there were only a few diverse members in his community. Michael did not speak much about his neighborhood, he briefly stated, “it’s pretty bad but I wasn’t in the worse part of it.” He explained how he did not hang out much outside, so he had little connection to the neighborhood.

**Elementary/High School.** Each participant received some sort of assistance in elementary school and high school that influenced the idea of college and helped prepare them for the experience. These students were aided through several opportunities. Michael stated “My senior year, the counselors worked with us in the library and we would apply to schools.” Derek talked about being introduced to the concept of college in eighth grade, where his teachers talked shared that “college is the mission.” Derek’s high school was attached to a university that combined high school and college curriculum. Anthony talked about being introduced to the idea of college in sixth grade by both his mother and teachers; he described the preparation he received in high school, “as providing him with the discipline he needed and how the school made students dress responsibly and to be on time and stay focused. James had talks with one of his high school teachers, where she would tell him “people get babied in high school, but that is not going to happen in college... she was always telling me to try to figure stuff out on



my own, and if I really need help, seek it out.” He also stated “I had a class that mainly focused on applying to college and scholarships that helped a lot.” This class is where James learned about financial aid, tuition costs, and what to expect.

These men not only received preparation or influence in school but they also attended events that informed them about college. Three of the four participants mentioned attending college fairs. Derek said “in eighth grade, they took us to a high school fair and a college fair.” Anthony talked about going to a few college tours while in high school. James mentioned having to go to college tours in high school as a requirement for sport participation. Although all participants did not attend college tours, all participants were educated on some aspect of college in high school.

### **Challenges Black Men Face Getting Admitted to Higher Education**

These Black men described the challenges they faced being admitted to higher education. The challenges that will be discussed include college preparation and being a first-generation student.

**College Preparation.** Three of the four participants made claims of doing average or above average in high school. Michael described himself as a “pretty obedient” student in high school, he said “I would barely miss school, if I missed the bus I would have to walk to school.” When talking about his grades he said “it was straight A’s, I had a 4.0.” Derek talked about college while in high school, he referred to the idea being “fiction” as though going to college was not possible. He was on the honor roll for most of his high school education. Anthony did well in high school earning a “3.0” the first few years. It was not until later that his grades started to decline. Anthony mentioned struggling in his math classes. James was the only participant that talked

about not doing well in school at all. He described having below average grades throughout high school. James would receive a range of grades but mostly C's and D's.

The ACT is a huge predictor on whether college access is possible. Three of the four participants spoke about retaking the ACT test multiple times. Michael took the ACT twice, he first received a 19 then later scored a 21. Derek talked about the most challenging section on the ACT was the reading section. He took the test three times scoring an 18, 20, then 21. Anthony took the ACT twice, the first time he scored a 19, then later scored a 20. James was the only participant that mentioned only taking the test once. He scored a 16 and stated "I still applied to college, I didn't let the ACT discourage me."

**First Generation College Students.** Three of the participants identified as a first-generation college student. Michael's parents did not attend college, and when asked if he had other family member in college he stated "no, besides my male cousin." Derek is also a first-generation student, and talked about his two cousins that attended and graduated from college, and about his father's experience, "my dad went to college and then dropped out." James does not have any family members that graduated from college. When talking about his family he stated,

my mother just got her GED not too long ago, but my brothers dropped out of high school, my sister finished high school but I don't know if she went to some type of trade school.

Anthony was the only participant that had at least one parent graduate from college. His mother graduated from college, and when talking about his father he said, he's been there [college] but he didn't finish college.

### **Obstacles Black Men Identify in Transitioning to a PWI**

These four participants shared their experiences of attending a PWI. When they were asked to share their initial college experiences they talked about girlfriends, roommates and academics as obstacles in their transition. In understanding the transition to a PWI for these participants it is important to first understand how they described their transition to college in general.

**Transition to College.** While discussing their transition to college, two of the four participants described their move-in experience. Derek talked about how going away to college was challenging, “I cried the first time I got here.” Michael did not say much about the move in process but described it as being “hectic.” Anthony and James had a roommate during their first year in college. Anthony had a White roommate that he did not know. James had a roommate his first year that he knew because it was a football teammate from high school, “everything worked out well, we never had any conflicts.”

Outside of roommates, these men established friendships with their classmates. Three of the four participants talked about friends that they made. Derek was admitted through a program offering to give additional assistance after admittance. Most of his friends were made through this program, and he described his friend group as being diverse. Anthony knew a few students prior to coming to school through a group chat designated for the school and shared, “I was going to the rec [recreation center] almost every day so I met people there and of course I met people in classes and at parties.” James made friends with his teammates from the track team. He is currently a resident assistant and also expressed making friends with individuals he works with in this

position. James shared that he has a diverse group of friends, “you can actually learn a lot from people that have different backgrounds.”

The men also spoke about more intimate relationships, those with a significant other and the impact it has had on their collegiate experience. Michael and Anthony talked specifically about how having a girlfriend impacted their experience in college. Michael shared that his girlfriend influenced him to attend college. Anthony had a girlfriend, but described the relationship as being stressful, “my mom feels like that played a role in why I wasn’t doing too well.”

All the men talked about their academic performance transitioning to college. All of the participants talked about being challenged in different ways to do well academically. Michael described his first academic year as good, he did not start doing “bad” in school until his sophomore year. This had to do with him not going to class and eventually caused him to start failing in those courses. Due to Derek’s low ACT score he had to be involved in an enrollment program that admitted him conditionally and required him to participate in a specific support program. He shared “I didn’t really get involved on campus ... just work, classes, and study table hours ... I didn’t really have any freedom or did anything I wanted to do, it was more about the requirements.” Derek explained not being satisfied with his first academic semester but worked harder and did better his second semester. Anthony described his first semester as being “pretty good,” and when he found his English class to be challenging he dropped the course. Anthony also talked about his Geography class being difficult, “my pride gets in the way of asking for help, I feel like I can do it all on my own and that gets me in a lot of messed up situations.” Despite dropping classes and finding classes to be difficult, he expressed

doing well during his first semester but felt like he performed poorly his second semester. When James talked about his first year in college he shared “it was a struggle adjusting to classes at different times and having all this free time.” He talked about feeling like he did poorly academically, “I finished with a 3.1, I consider that still a rough start because I was having trouble with balancing my time, like setting a schedule for when to do homework.”

**Transition to a PWI.** All four participants were asked about their transition to a PWI. Most of the participants came from predominately Black neighborhoods and predominately Black high schools. Michael grew up in a predominately Black neighborhood and attended a high school that was predominantly Black, and in talking about attending this institution and the predominantly White environment he shared, “it did make me uncomfortable, especially by me growing up thinking most White people are racist. He talked about having some racist encounters and referred to it as “just life.” Similar to Michael, James grew up in a predominately Black neighborhood and attended a predominantly Black high school. When asked the question about transitioning to a PWI James shared “people say racist things, you learn to deal with that, it’s going to be people like that in the world all the time, you just hear it and keep moving.” He explained how he did not have any White classmates in high school, only White teachers, so the transition was a bit difficult but not challenging for him. However, Derek’s high school was predominantly White, so he talked about having a more natural adjustment to the PWI. When discussing the transition to a PWI, Anthony talked about the off campus community, “there has been some acts of racism, but I’m not going to generalize an entire race.”

All four participants expressed feeling stressed at some point during college, but none of the explanations had anything to do with attending a PWI. They did all talk about relying on other people in their lives to get through these challenging moments. Michael shared being stressed because of his military obligations while in school. While Derek talked about feeling overwhelmed about the programs he was involved in and following certain deadlines, and how during these stressful times, he contacts his sister, watches the Disney channel, or eats popcorn. Anthony talked about feeling stressed about academics and his girlfriend at the time. He also talked about the stress of failing classes and shared “I never failed a class in high school, so failing made me uncomfortable.” When stressed, Anthony reaches out to his parents and sister, he also shared “I have this one friend that I went to high school with, I can talk to him about certain situations.” James shared that he did not stress much about his academics but more so about the safety of his family back home, “I don’t let my mom know that I’m worried because she doesn’t want me to worry.” None of the four participants mentioned feeling unsafe in their environment.

### **Summary**

Chapter five presented the analysis of information that was found through the interview process with the participants. The research questions were examined and their responses were compared. This chapter allows readers to gain understanding of these Black men journey’s to and through higher education. In chapter 6 the discussion of these findings will be presented and recommendations for student affairs professionals and students will be suggested.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the research and highlight the experiences the participants endured prior to coming to college and their transition to college. Implications for student affairs professionals, Black males, and teachers and guidance counselors will be presented to help understand the issues faced by Black male students getting to higher education. This qualitative study utilized interviews that allowed different perspectives to be shared. The purpose of the study was to understand what influences Black men to attend college, what challenges they are facing being admitted to college, and what obstacles they may experience attending a PWI. With these results, we can begin to understand what other Black men may experience with their journey to college.

All participants grew up near the same large Midwestern metropolitan city. Growing up near the same environments can limit the variety of experiences the participants are able to offer to the study. The majority of the participants grew up in a predominately Black environment. These environments can influence the way these individuals perceive the world and their surroundings. This is important to remember when exploring the results of the study.

#### **Influences for Black Men to Attend College**

Factors identified that influence Black men to attend college include neighborhoods, family structure, resources, and self-motivation. All participants provided explanations on how these factors played a role in determining whether they

enroll in college. The people and resources provided to these students encouraged them to attend and be successful in college.

**Neighborhoods.** Most participants talked about living in predominately Black neighborhoods, and two talked specifically about living in a neighborhood that experienced gang activity. While for some individuals living in tough environments can be a deterrent in the choice to attend college and succeed, in this case it seemed to be a major motivator internally and externally, it was a path out of the situation. For the participants of this study getting out of their neighborhoods was a motivating factor. Some spoke about getting a degree as equipping them to give back to their community. It's a way of serving as a role model for their neighborhood, especially young Black men. According to Longmire-Avital and Miller-Dyce (2015), education is the most critical factor in obtaining social mobility for Black families. Earning a graduate degree provides an individual with the skills necessary to be qualified for jobs that will increase economic status and expand the environments participants can afford to live in. In addition to neighborhoods influencing students to want to attend college, family played a huge role in inspiring the idea of college.

**Family Structure.** All of the participants had support from their family concerning their college goals. Most of the participants in this study were coming from a single parent home where they lived with their mother and she was influential in making sure they got to college. Their mothers did this by sending them to a specific secondary school, getting them support, and general encouragement to attend and do well in school. Although most of the participants came from single mother households, we cannot



assume that most of these men are coming from fatherless homes. It was evident in this study that their mothers were key factors in their getting to college.

Not only were mothers a huge influence on college enrollment, siblings, and extended family that graduated from college talked to the participants about their college experience and inspired them to attend college alike. In an interview conducted by Matthews (2003), with Wayne Camara, the vice president of research and development for the College Board in talking about the gap between Black and White student access to higher education states “It is the differences in the kinds of support they have in school and in the community and in the home” (p. 134). All participants in the study talked about having family members support them with their academics and influence their decision to go to college. The level of a student’s success is not solely dependent upon the type of support received from school, support from the family can greatly encourage a student to succeed.

**Resources.** Students living in low socio-economic communities attending public schools are exposed to environments that are the results of a low socio-economic status (Harper & Griffin, 2010). Public schools are limited to funds that are provided by property taxes which are dependent on where one lives (Kurban, Gallagher & Persky, 2012). Although it is assumed that most Black students growing up in these harsh communities are lacking the resources to be successful, none of the participants talked about lacking resources to prepare them for college, instead they mentioned having several types of support for preparation. They mentioned having coaches, mentors, teachers, guidance counselors, and even classes that educated them on how to apply to college and what to expect when enrolling. Most participants of this study attended

college fairs and tours that gave them a better understanding of what a college institution looks like and what may be requested of them. All resources were very influential in the participants' decision to attend college.

Mentoring plays an important role in Black males considering and attending post-secondary education (Richardson, 2012). James talked about being heavily involved in sports while in high school. His coaches were the only individuals he knew that graduated from college. His coaches had positive talks with him, giving him encouraging words about the importance of college. Richardson (2012) explains how Black male coaches play an important role in reducing crime for young at-risk Black students and inspire positive outcomes. These individuals can influence growth and development within these young men that would not have been achieved outside of their relationship. Coaches not only are considered a positive male role model but also give these Black male students a visual of what they could possibly achieve. Black men at PWI's often lack the guidance and support from individuals that look like them and relying on those mentors from their high schools and neighborhoods is important.

Derek had resources available to him that provided a mentor at the school location. This mentor guided Derek through both academic and personal obligations and continues to help him through his college experiences. Richardson (2012), explains how having both youths and parents involved in social community activities such as church, recreational centers, and sports provides access to adult role models who can have a positive influence on young people. Many of the participants identified activities they were involved in and these influencing them in positive ways. Getting Black boys to participate with extracurricular activities outside of the home created more access for

students to find and have mentors. These students benefited from having Black mentors in the K-12 system as they matured and prepared for college; more importantly they helped ensure the student's success in college.

**Self-Motivation.** Despite the challenges Black men have enrolling in college, they are still motivated to succeed and persist throughout their college career. Black students are positively encouraged to enter college based on their personal educational and occupational aspirations (Strayhorn, 2015). All four participants had personal goals of becoming successful and serving as a leader, coach, teacher, officer in the army and a college graduate like their family members. With these careers, they have hopes of increasing their socio-economic status, being able to support themselves and their family. These men shared having some sort of self-motivation; wanting to do better for themselves and their family, and this being the reason why they want to earn a college degree. Each participant talked about being determined to attend college from an early age. What made the difference was the family, schools, and the resources provided, but most importantly having people from various parts of their lives believing in them and supporting them toward success. The internal voice of a student can only get stronger with the support from external voices. Individuals who are lacking external voices to support their academic goals and dreams will lose their vision of success and fail to attempt to follow their dreams (Dickerson, 2015; Rodgers & Summers, 2008). These men benefited from positive encouragement and reinforcement to build their confidence allowing them to know that a college degree is possible and in their reach.

### **Challenges Black Men Face Getting Admitted to Higher Education**

Two barriers were identified when analyzing the challenges Black men face getting admitted to higher education; those being low test scores on standardized tests and first-generation student status. All participants spoke about not doing well on their ACT tests and most came from backgrounds lacking family members that earned a college degree. Despite these challenges, the men in this study are overcoming these barriers and continuing to pursue their goals.

**Low Test Scores.** All participants scored lower on their ACT or standardized tests. Most participants attempted to retake the test but to little avail scored nearly the same or one to two points differently. Some assessments taken have indicated that Black students tend to score lower than White students at a national level and they have a lower academic achievement rate (Robinson, 2010). Some Black men are coming from separate and disordered K-12 and high school systems that are underserving them (Hoyle & Kutka, 2008). Most of the participants in this study talked about receiving some type of preparation for college through guidance counselors, classes dedicated to college preparation, and attending college fairs. Although they had these options, they still struggled and scored low on their ACT. School systems need to do a better job preparing all students for standardized tests, and standardized tests need to be evaluated regularly for any bias that may be present. If equal resources and opportunities are provided to students, higher test scores can be achieved.

**First Generation Students.** Three of the participants were identified as being a first-generation college student. Jackson (2012), stated that first generation students usually have disadvantages that cause them to have limited knowledge about college.

The participants provided specific examples of class assignments in high school dedicated to preparing for and applying to college. These men had assistance with preparing them to enroll in college, but some participants explained not feeling comfortable with filling out applications such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The first generation status appeared to cause some of these participants additional challenges.

Although parents lacked the knowledge about college and what to expect, nearly all participants spoke about having close relatives that had experience attending college and earned a degree. This made it easier for the first generation students to learn more about what to expect while applying to college and what to do once enrolled. There were a variety of relationships these men had that they could depend on to receive college support.

One area that is often the most challenging toward attending is paying for college. Few participants spoke about financial obligations and aid received or needed to pay for college. Although there was a lack of conversation about financial status and how they are paying for college, this is certainly a huge factor that determines whether an individual can attend college (Harper & Griffin, 2010). Some participants mentioned briefly that if they had financial issues that would be the only thing that would prevent them from continuing to attend college. King (2009), identified that barriers to access higher education deal with the differences of cultural, linguistic, income and ability background. One participant spoke about being awarded scholarships, and one student spoke about losing a scholarship due to his bad grades, but did not speak further about how he was able to cover the cost of tuition. It is important to know that money is

essential to attending college, more questions need to be built around how students are paying for college.

### **Obstacles in Transitioning to College**

There were some challenges identified from the participants' experience attending college. Participants described experiences related to the transition to college as well as the transition to a PWI. Further information will be provided to understand the experiences of these students and their transition to college.

**Transition to College.** Within the transition to college, participants mentioned having relationships with others that became supportive to them during their transition. The participants also spoke about academics and campus involvement that both challenged and aided their transition to college. All these factors played a huge role in each participant's journey through college.

**Relationships.** Moving away to college can be very new and challenging for some students. All of the participants talked about having strong family connections and support while in high school. Coming to college changes those relationships as they meet new and different people that impact their transition. Most of the men described their transition to college as being scary, new, and something to get used to. Only two of the men had roommates, one of the participants knew his roommate from high school and the other participant had a White roommate that became a good friend to him. Michael did not have a roommate and talked about how he wished he had a roommate to get the entire college experience. The participants spoke about easily establishing friendships. These friendships were developed through classes, jobs, and organizations they were involved in and most of the friends they met early in their time in college were white. Only one

participant talked about having little to no friends, he described himself as being antisocial and quiet, and he lived alone.

Only two of the participants talked about having girlfriends in college. Michael's closest friend was his girlfriend, they spent most of their time together outside of attending classes. Anthony also had a girlfriend and talked about how stressful the relationship was for him and how that may have affected his academic performance. Although that relationship was stressful for that participant, all of the relationships formed created a sense of belonging for the students and made them comfortable in their environments.

***Academics.*** Participants talked about having to be involved in student support services to gain assistance toward being successful in college. Research suggests that, if minority students are able to get admitted to higher education, Black men are afforded an opportunity to be involved in programs that provide additional support such as the TRiO program (Palmer et al., 2014). These programs have been proven to be helpful in supporting students throughout their college education. The participants talked about struggling with their grades during their first semester. Bastedo and Gumport (2003) reported, educational performance is essential to success in higher education. Although some of these men did poorly in the beginning of their college experience, they persisted and improved their grades in their second semester and second year attending college.

***Involvement.*** The participants talked about being involved in organizations and sports on campus. A factor identified as being important for Black college student achievement is involvement in Black student organizations (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Derek talked about how being involved in the provisional program made it difficult for

him to prioritize his work and prevented him from being involved in extracurricular activities. Although he wanted to be involved, his academic obligations prevented him from being as involved in other activities as he would have liked. James talked about how his low high school GPA prevented him from being involved in sport activities like he anticipated. This motivated him to do better in his classes so he could be eligible to play sports on campus. Being involved on campus provided participants with a sense of belonging and made them feel comfortable on campus. Involvement also created connections helping students build friendships. Along with other resources, sport activities can be a huge influencer for students to do well academically.

**Transition to a PWI.** The participants in this study identified as coming from predominantly Black communities and attending high school in predominately Black schools. They then chose a college that did not match the environment they grew up in, which could be a limitation of this study. In the transition to a PWI, participants identified being uncomfortable in their new environment and feeling stressed.

***Uncomfortable & Stressed.*** None of the participants talked about feeling unsafe in their college environment. Although he did not feel unsafe, Anthony talked about feeling uncomfortable living in a predominately White environment because of previous racial interactions he had experienced growing up. No participant identified that attending a PWI directly related to stress in their lives. The stress these students typically experienced was due to academics and relationships. Another participant when discussing living in a predominantly White environment explained being optimistic about the new opportunities to learn about a new demographic of students.



## **Implications**

This section is dedicated to providing recommendations to individuals to assist with the underrepresentation of Black men in higher education. It is intended to expand your minds to the challenges these Black students endure and how they overcome these challenges. The recommendations are provided for student affairs professionals, Black males, high school teachers, and guidance counselors. These individuals are important to the development, college preparation, and access to college for a Black man. Suggestions made will help aid the male student through his entire educational process.

**Student Affairs Professionals.** There is a need for professionals to recruit and retain Black male students, faculty and staff in higher education. Black males may not always have the support and guidance needed in a college setting. If there are more diverse individuals serving as faculty and staff this will create a sense of belonging for these students and allow them to visualize that success is a possibility. In some cases institutions should cultivate their own students to move into these roles. This is important because it can increase retention rates of diverse individuals including Black men and creates a more inclusive and diverse student body that equips students for success after college.

Along with increasing the diversity of faculty and staff and increasing retention, admission requirements need to be modified in order to allow more minority students access to higher education. It is known that White students tend to score higher on their standardized tests than Black students, which are the tests students need to do well on to be considered for admission to college. Admission requirements that are dependent on high school GPA and letters of recommendation will more accurately determine the

likeliness of college success. We must find a way to modify these admission requirements to reflect all students' abilities.

First generation students were identified as the majority of participants in the study. Some of these students had resources from high school to help prepare for college, while others depended on the knowledge of their family and friends to prepare them. More resources need to be developed and provided to assist students that may not have family or friends to help with the demands of applying to and attending college. These resources can be provided in both high school and college to teach students what to expect while in college and how to navigate through the transition. With additional resources for first-generation students this can increase the confidence of a student in their abilities to achieve their goals. More social outlets need to be created to allow students to feel comfortable in their environment and thrive. Support of these outlets are necessary to maintain strong relationships with these students and provide encouraging environments for students to succeed.

Housing options were identified in the study as essential to the transition to college. Housing for freshman should be evaluated and adjusted requiring all freshman students to live on campus. Single rooms should not be an option for students until they reach their sophomore or junior year. Assessments should be taken to determine when a student is developed enough to live on their own. Some participants in the study shared how not having a roommate took away from their college experience. It may be too soon after high school that students are able to make the decision to live on their own, especially if they have never done so before. Roommates can be considered a positive way to help students get adjusted to college life.

**Black Males.** Don't be afraid to ask for help. Your instructors are present solely to educate you. Take full advantage of your learning opportunities and develop as much as you can. Some participants described themselves as being stubborn at times and prideful not wanting to ask for help and just figuring things out on their own. There is nothing wrong with asking questions, you are not expected to know everything. Asking questions about college and academics in general will increase your knowledge and help you develop personally and professionally.

Being educated is cool. Try your best not to fall into the peer pressures of doing poorly in school. It may be fun to skip classes and be considered a cool kid, but it is not beneficial to your educational future. Being cool will not last past high school. Although you do not see a lot of professionals that look like you, believe in yourself and your ability to succeed. Harper (2015), shared that Black men are pursuing degrees despite the low expectations placed upon them. Keep moving forward in school and know that anything is possible, do not doubt yourself. Don't be afraid to voice your opinions and express how you learn best.

Don't get discouraged. College may seem like an impossible feat, it is not. Believing in yourself and actively searching for resources to help in your journey will make the transition possible. Do not automatically assume you are not college material or that college is not a reality. If you have positive supportive individuals surrounding you, it can increase the influence of applying and enrolling into college. If you get rejected from one college, do not stop searching, continue to persist through the search and find the best fit for yourself.

Be mentors. Do not think of your journey as your own. Remember you are paving a way for younger Black men to follow in your footsteps. Help other men looking up to you do the same. So many people will admire you from a distance and aspire to succeed like you. Please reach out to others and teach them what you know. Help your family and friends by telling them about your experiences and your process. Even if they do not ask, volunteer your services, this will go a long way.

If attending a PWI, know that the adjustment may be challenging but it is not impossible. Black students who do not feel they belong on a college campus experience negative effects on their academic and personal growth (Harper, 2015; Kayoko Peralta, 2016; Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). Most of the participants did not express feeling as if they do not belong on the college campus. Be aware that everyone's college experience is different. Your college experience and optimism depends on your experiences. You can feel either comfortable or uncomfortable in your surroundings, but you are still able to push forward and succeed.

**Teachers & Guidance Counselors.** The preparation for college is dependent on teachers and guidance counselors. Teachers should have direct intentional conversations with students about what to expect when attending college. These conversations need to start at a young age even before high school. Introducing these ideas at a young age is important to normalize the conversations and awareness of college. Students should be taught the differences between elementary, high school and college and how there will be great independence and responsibility required of individuals. These types of conversations had with teachers can have a lasting impact on students' ideas of college and prepare them for the college experience. Teachers simply talking to their students and

building connections can make a huge difference in the awareness of college and whether a student applies to college.

Guidance counselors are important sources of information. These individuals help inform students about college applications and what to look for while searching for schools. Counselors cannot be the only individuals outside of teachers that are preparing students for college. More resources like class courses need to be designed specifically to educate students about college to help make them confident to attack the new challenges of college. If students are required to take courses made to teach them about the college application process and to answer questions some students may not be able to ask family or friends about in preparation for college.

Both teachers and guidance counselors need to work together with local colleges to become educated on the changing demands of college students. It is known that not all schools provide the proper preparation of their students for college. If colleges are willing to reach out to local schools lacking resources, high schools will be better prepared to educate their students on how to accomplish those requirements. Colleges can provide resources such as books, classes, or even scholarships for incoming students meeting certain requirements designed to cater to underrepresented groups. Having these close relationships will allow students to keep up with the demands and changes of college admission.

Guidance counselors and teachers should actively serve as mentors for their students. The communication these adults have with their students is essential to how the student develops. It is important for guidance counselors and teachers to remember to be a positive role model for students. Some students are not exposed to adults that can guide

them properly or teach them what they need to know about college. Just being there for your students and being genuine to them will make a huge difference in their outlook on life and how they continue with their lives.

In applying to colleges, high schools need to require students to be involved in at least one extracurricular activity. Not only will being involved help students develop skills that could be transferable to college, it can also present students with opportunities they otherwise would not have and shape individuals into well rounded people. Requiring students to be involved will also allow Black males to be exposed to more Black male role models that are coaches at the high school level. This will provide nothing but positive influences for men to be encouraged by successful Black role models.

### **Recommendations for Future Research.**

This research is only one piece toward understanding the experiences of Black men getting in to and thriving in college. Future research can benefit from expanding knowledge on Black men's collegiate experience; and comparing Black men to Black women and their entrance to as well as the collegiate experiences. One way to look at this is how different resources are provided to Black men and women that results in higher numbers of Black women attending and graduating from higher education.

Researching Black men and White men to clarify the differences in the experience of applying and enrolling in college will also be beneficial. Not only should Black and White men be studied to evaluate access to college, other minority student populations can be studied and compared to Black men. These results will help to understand the differences in preparation for higher education and its relationship to race and ethnicity.

Only Black men that were enrolled and attending a four year college were interviewed, if Black men not attending college were interviewed, a better understanding of their experiences and what prevented them from attending college could have been identified. Comparing those results to a study like this could help in discovering what solutions can be made to increase the number of Black men attending college. If more men from different living environments, including rural, suburban, and urban, were interviewed, a variety of responses could have been identified to establish more solutions to the issue of minority underrepresentation in higher education. More research needs to be developed focusing on the high school experiences of Black men. Tracking Black men through high school and beyond will allow researchers to compare journeys of those that attend college compared to those that do not.

Research also needs to be conducted at different institutions such as private, HBCU's, and two-year community colleges, along with different regions of the United States. Looking at different institution types would provide a wide range of perspectives influencing Black males choice to attend varying institutions. In this study, the experience of Black male students at PWI's were not very detailed. Gaining more information would provide greater insight on how to enhance Black male undergraduates at PWI's.

### **Summary**

The results of the study indicate that Black men have several influences that lead them to higher education. One of the key influences to college application is family and friend support. Coaches and mentors also played a significant role in presenting the idea of college. With their transition to college, challenges were identified as gaining access

to college and having adequate preparation prior to attending college. Most participants had support services or programs that were geared towards preparing them for college while in high school. Although they had these resources, some students were still confused about the college application process and ill prepared to complete forms such as the FAFSA. More programs need to be made available in the K-12 system to prepare students for college at an earlier age. Through the experiences of the participants it was identified that it is important to create support programs and required classes dedicated to the topic of post-secondary education. Introducing these programs at a younger age is essential to motivate students throughout their educational experience that college is possible and an option for them. This study is just a piece of the puzzle to the entire solution. More research on this topic must be established to create successful change. Extended resources are needed in the underfunded K-12 systems to ensure these Black men have a sufficient path to higher education. More Black male role models need to be visible in the education system. The sight of a successful Black man will give these students the common thought that success is likely and in their future.



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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself.
  - a. Tell me about your family structure?
  - b. How would your friends/family describe you?
2. Where did you grow up?
  - a. Tell me about the neighborhood you grew up in?
3. How was your childhood and high school experience?
  - a. Tell me about your friend groups? Did they change over time?
  - b. What sorts of things did you do with your family? Friends?
4. What sorts of extracurricular activities were you involved with in high school?
  - a. Why did you get involved?
5. What kind of student were you in high school?
  - a. How did that differ from elementary/middle school?
  - b. What kind of grades did you get?
  - c. What areas were most challenging for you?
  - d. What kind of support did you receive while going through high school? Who did it come from? Did you seek it out or was it a requirement?
  - e. Tell me about the preparation you received in high school for college.
  - f. Tell me about your ACT/SAT scores?
6. Tell me about any other obligations outside of school growing up?
7. Tell me about the people you looked up to prior to coming to college? What role did they play in your life?
  - a. What was your connection to this person?
    - i. Did they attend college?
  - b. What sort of influence did they have on you?
8. When were you first introduced to the idea of college?
  - a. Tell me about how it was brought up?
  - b. Who had these conversations with you?
  - c. What did people tell you?
9. How was college talked about as you were growing up?
10. Did you have family members attend or graduate from college?
  - a. If so, who? What did they tell you about college?
  - b. If no, do you know why they didn't attend college? (Specifically parents)
11. Tell me about your process of selecting a college.
  - a. Did you go on any college tours while in high school? Tell me about that experience.
  - b. Did you attend any college fairs or information sessions? Tell me about that experience.
12. Tell me about your college application process?
  - a. Did anyone help you apply? Who – what role did they play?
  - b. What did they provide you with in the process?
13. How many colleges did you apply to? Tell me about that process.
14. How did you prepare for college?

- a. What sorts of information did you receive – and from where?
15. Tell me about your first year at the institution?
- a. What sorts of things did you get involved in?
  - b. Where did you live and who did you live with?
  - c. Tell me about the friends you made and the groups you associated with.
16. Tell me about your academic performance your first year?
- a. What types of classes were you taking?
  - b. Did you need outside assistance – where did that come from?
  - c. Did you participate in study groups? Tell me about that?
  - d. What was your level of satisfaction with that first year?
17. Have you experienced stress while here in college? Tell me about what has caused that stress?
- a. Who do you turn to in those stressful situations?
  - b. What do you do to alleviate the stress?
18. On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your first year of college? Tell me why you rate that number.
19. What made you return to college?
- a. Was there anything that could have prevented you from returning – what did you do to overcome it?

## Appendix B

### Email to Potential Participants

To: Participant

Subject: Interview Participation

Hi Participant,

My name is **Kayla Branch**. I am a graduate student here at EIU in the College Student Affairs program. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are an African American Black sophomore student attending a Predominantly White Institution. Your participation in this study is voluntary. I am requesting to conduct an interview with you to ask a few questions about your high school and college experience. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate. Thank you for taking your time to consider participating in my study. Please contact me by email at [krbranch@eiu.edu](mailto:krbranch@eiu.edu) with any questions.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact me at the email address provided, or my thesis advisor, Dr. Timm at [dtimm@eiu.edu](mailto:dtimm@eiu.edu).

## Appendix C

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

#### Access to Higher Education for Black Men.

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Kayla Branch and Dr. Timm, from the College Student Affairs department at Eastern Illinois University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to examine what is motivating Black men to enter college. I aim to understand what is getting you here and what is encouraging you to graduate and earn a degree. In order to obtain these results three questions will be asked.

Research questions are as followed, what influences Black men to attend college, what challenges are Black men facing being admitted to higher education, and what obstacles do Black men identify in transitioning to a Predominately White Institution (PWI)? These questions will support the research in discovering what is influencing Black men to go to college.

- **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Schedule one meeting to be interviewed. Interviews will last about an hour and a half at the most. The interviewed will be recorded by a cell phone recording application that will be secured with a secure passcode for the entire duration the interview is saved to it.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Minimal risk will be endured during this study. You could possibly be reminded of bad childhood thoughts about home environment or concerns about being in a college environment. Some of the questions may cause you to be uncomfortable or hard to explain.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Benefits of the study includes you learning more about yourself both personally and professionally. Our conversations will hopefully you give new perspectives about college and the transition that had never occurred before.

With just one person, you can create change, if you are interested in these benefits you will be motivated to succeed. You will benefit the world by becoming a productive citizen in society.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of replacing your name with a pseudonym so you can not be identified. Your responses will also be compared to others to see similarities in your experiences to confirm research.

Data collected from the interviews will be stored safely on a password protected laptop owned by the researcher. Transcriptions of the interview will be safe on the laptop and will only be viewed by the researcher and the thesis adviser.

Results of the study will be presented to a committee of advisors who will determine if the results of the study are accurate and fully answers the questions asked to determine this specific success of Black men. The results then will be presented as a master's thesis and printed as available research to others. It will be accessible to the public through Eastern Illinois University (EIU) library.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Kayla Branch:

[krbranch@eiu.edu](mailto:krbranch@eiu.edu)

872-333-6462

Dr. Timm

[dtimm@eiu.edu](mailto:dtimm@eiu.edu)

• **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board  
Eastern Illinois University  
600 Lincoln Ave.  
Charleston, IL 61920  
Telephone: (217) 581-8576  
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

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I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

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Printed Name of Participant

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

*Use the following signature line for minor/handicapped subjects only if applicable.*

I hereby consent to the participation of \_\_\_\_\_, a minor/subject in the investigation herein described. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my child's participation at any time.

---

Signature of Minor/Handicapped Subject's Parent or Guardian

---

Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

---

Signature of Investigator

---

Date