

OBTAINING GOLD: A HEURISTIC INQUIRY ON SUCCESSFUL NON-TRADITIONAL
BLACK MALE STUDENTS AT A MIDWESTERN
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative, heuristic study was to explore the successful experiences of nontraditional Black male students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) in the Midwest. With an astounding rate of growth of the nontraditional student populations in higher education, this study was conducted to contribute to the literature on nontraditional students; challenge deficit views on Black male education, and highlight the perspectives of successful nontraditional Black males in a postsecondary setting. As of this writing, extensive research focuses on the barriers to success such as racism, financial hardship, and lack of role models that hinder their success at colleges and universities, with little centering on the innate skills and abilities that lead to Black male success.

This study was designed to promote the voices of successful Black male students and understand their perceptions of influences that contribute to their college success with a focus on students that identify as nontraditional. The research questions were: (1) How do nontraditional Black male students define success? (2)

What are the college experiences of successful nontraditional Black male students at Mid Western University? and (3) To what internal and external factors do nontraditional Black male students attribute their college success?

Fourteen Black male students who identified as nontraditional were interviewed, and the findings were utilized to explore the research questions for this qualitative study. The primary method of data analysis were the six basic phases in the heuristic process of phenomenological analysis: (a) initial engagement, (b) immersion, (c) incubation, (d) illumination, (e) explication, and (f) creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). Students provided varying definitions of success: (1) social integration and (2) independent thinking and financial independence.

In defining what contributed to their success, two themes were discovered: (1) the value and beliefs of life and (2) support and belonging. Students suggested that they had intrinsic motivations and external motivators helping them succeed in terms of their values and beliefs. Additionally, students identified multiple sources of support and belonging, including acceptance, peer interactions, family influence, and building connections and relationships. The study findings are insightful as to how these nontraditional Black male students perceived their college success. Implications for this study include changing the overall negative narrative of Black male students and especially those who identify as nontraditional, by giving them the needed voice of their perceptions which aided their success. As PWIs look at increasing enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of this population, there is a need to expand the identified approaches, programs, and supports that participants attribute to their success. Future research direction includes: (1) an exploration of

experiences of the nontraditional Black male student, their journey from elementary education to college; (2) a narrative study on faculty and staff perspectives on nontraditional Black male students; (3) a longitudinal inquiry to provide a national perspective on the success of nontraditional Black male students who attended five years after graduation; (4) increased research that uses asset-based and anti-deficit approaches to illuminate nontraditional Black male students' voices.

Keywords: Black males, nontraditional, success, anti-deficit, higher education

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Education, have examined a dissertation titled “Obtaining Gold: A Heuristic Inquiry on Successful Non-Traditional Black Male Students at a Midwestern Predominantly White Institution,” presented by Roland A. Hemmings, Jr., candidate for the Doctor of Education degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation work is dedicated to my family: Shelby, Anja, Amaja and Alija and the memory of my mother, Jacinta Mark.

My ladies: Your love, support, and encouragement allow me to achieve more each day. To my mother, Jacinta Mark: You may not have known this, but you have always been my inspiration and mentor. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me in everything that I did, and it saddens me to have to lose you to be better. I am who I am today because of you, how to love all people through your many examples. I love you and miss you.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Education is Power”

Little Black boy, go to school and Learn¹

Little Black boy, show some concern.

Little Black boy, education is the key

To get you off the street and off poverty.

I remember the song vividly; it has struck a chord. It echoes the importance of education. Any time that I think of this song, I reflect on the theme of being an educated Black boy with the aspiration of triumph. Who would have thought many years later it would also cause me to reflect on the phenomenon? The phenomenon of being successful, a Black male, and how it relates to my own experiences in college as well as those of others who shared this identity? The song describes what seems to be a simple proposition of going to school, to becoming a success. It acknowledges the power of education to get one out of adversity and ultimately realizes that education has more control over one’s future than circumstances.

After much thought, I realized that for me, there was a deeper meaning from this song that applied to a societal stereotype that shows a lack of desire for education by Black boys. I never considered my own experiences as a successful Black male. American society sees Black males as entertainers, athletes, or criminals. There is a constant reminder in the United

¹ Calypso from Trinidad & Tobago by Gypsy

States that if you are Black, somehow, you are less than others. Not too often are Black males perceived as intelligent or academically inclined. Thus, education is crucial and essential for the creation of a better tomorrow for the Black boy.

What does that mean in American society? Education is at the heart of supporting social growth, equality, and justice by enhancing the lives of future generations (Calder, 2007; Cortese, 2003). Many Black nontraditional male students are overwhelmed by society's negative impressions of them (lazy, unintelligent, or violent). The notion of a college education is viewed as the foundation for the potential of a higher status, a measure of academic success, and the beginning of professional and financial opportunity (Harper & Harris, 2012). As an individual who has an interest in opportunity and success for Black nontraditional male students, I desired to examine the experiences of these individuals whose stories, unfortunately, are few in research.

Nontraditional students have been an addition to the institution of higher education and have been met with tremendous challenges. These include inadequate course offerings, adjunct professors, and a lack of socializing on campus (Bonner et al., 2015; Goings, 2017; Wyatt, 2011). This circumstance, intensified by complex home and work requests, often brings about an absence of students to persist to graduation, with about 11% of nontraditional students achieving a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). These difficulties are combined with the failure to precisely characterize the population in higher education (Remenick, 2019). Nontraditional students are described in a multitude of different ways and terminologies. Now, the combined

intersectionality of being Black, Male and Nontraditional comes with additional burdens.

While enrollment has increased over time for Black males (Baum et al., 2010; Bowen & Bok, 1999; Cuyjet, 1997, 2006a; Farmer & Hope, 2015; Harper & Newman, 2016) their enrollment rates are not proportionate to their population nor the enrollment rates of other race/ethnic demographics (NCES, 2017). The gap grows as students head toward graduation. Black male college completion rates are lowest among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in U.S. higher education (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2010). Across four cohorts of undergraduates, the six-year graduation rate for Black male students attending public colleges and universities was 33.3%, compared to 48.1% for students overall (Harper, 2012).

The reasons for the gaps in enrollment and graduation are varied. Black males have many challenges along their educational paths which may affect their success rates in college, such as low teacher expectations (Gershenson et al., 2016; Harper, 2012), inadequate academic preparation for post-secondary-level work (Harper, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015; Harper & Newman, 2016), racism (Bridges, 2010), and culturally unresponsive campus environments (Cameron & Heckman, 2001; Harper, 2006). Where there is a lack of structures or systems to support this group of individuals, the opportunities for success continue to be problematic, resulting in fewer and fewer Black males in higher education who will ultimately graduate (Matthews-Whetstone & Scott, 2015). Since Black male students are persisting and graduating with a college degree at disproportionately low rates, there is a clear need for researchers and educators to study the external and internal factors that may contribute to successful Black male college students and examine the influences and experiences that push them toward the completion of an undergraduate degree despite negative societal images.

In addition to the challenges presented above, there are many perceptual reasons for the disparity in Black student persistence and degree completion. These include the racial and cultural environment of the institution and students' sense of belonging. For example, Black students will likely leave a college or university if they have experienced racial harassment or discrimination or do not feel a connection with the institution (Harper, 2012; Palmer, Davis et al., 2010; Strayhorn, 2010). Harper (2012) argued that the use of a generic or one-size-fits-all practice to impact all students cannot be used, more so positively for Black males. He recommended exploring Black male students' lived experiences of college persistence as a way to better understand the path to accomplishment, while outlining that higher education institutions need to establish policy and create interventions and programs intended for Black males. In the educational setting, the discussion of Black males, the focal point of the discourse is the perceived shortcomings of Black males. Current research has focused on Black male academic underachievement as well as adverse institutional experiences related to all racial groups (Farmer & Hope, 2015) rather than stories of persistence and success.

Problem Statement

Harmful components are inherent in many Black men's college careers such as few enroll in college relative to their population (Allen, 1992; Cameron & Heckman, 2001; Farmer & Hope 2015) and disengagement (Harper, 2015). Many experience low achievement in postsecondary education (Palmer et al., 2010), hence the result of low college degree completion. However, an excess of research focuses on the negatives aspects of Black male students in higher education with little

concentrating on their successes. Additionally, nontraditional students are the new majority in the classroom, and it is imperative to learn how to work with them. In doing a simple search on Google Scholar on “Black males and education,” the results showed over 3,910,000 articles ranging from “The Trouble with Black Boys” (Noguera, 2003) and “Exploring the Challenges that Threaten to Impede Academic Success” (Palmer et al., 2009) to “Peril and Promise in the Education of African American Males” (Howard, 2014). Thus, there is a gap in the literature regarding Black males’ persistence toward completing the undergraduate degree (Garibaldi, 1992; Jackson & Moore, 2006). In this section, I preview the existing literature to highlight the need for Black male success stories.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has defined nontraditional students as having one or more of the following seven characteristics: delayed enrollment in postsecondary education, part-time enrollment, financially independent of their parent, work full time while enrolled, have dependents other than a spouse, are single parents, or lack a standard high school diploma, even adding the characteristics of the first-generation student and veteran status (NCES, 2017). NCES further defines nontraditional students on a continuum of minimally nontraditional, who present one nontraditional characteristic; to moderately nontraditional, who exhibit two to three characteristics; to highly nontraditional, who display four or more attributes (NCES, 2017).

In recent years, individuals have been increasingly voicing their concerns about Black males in higher education and, in particular, about the ability to persist and graduate by Black nontraditional male students (McGee, 2013). There is very little literature that investigates the experiences of nontraditional Black males students (Goings, 2018). Rosser-Mims et al. (2014), in *Swimming Upstream: Black Males in Adult Education* (Rosser-Mims et al., 2014),

have provided insight into the educational experiences of nontraditional Black males. In the concluding chapter, Rosser-Mims et al. (2014) argued the need for future studies on the experiences of high-achieving Black male students.

Palmer et al. (2010) stated that there is an increasing need for American higher education institutions to educate an increasingly diverse student populace for America to compete in the world's global economy. Perhaps the most significant challenge will be increasing college access rates for low-income and ethnic minority students, who are often the first generation to attend college (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Historically, the United States has been slow to respond or support the needs of Black students in education (Palmer et al., 2010; Toldson, 2014), which perpetuates the achievement gap.

Incomplete literature can potentially produce psychological inferences to Black male individuals, the interactions with their professors, and professors' expectations (Palmer et al., 2010). Because these students are typically older and are balancing families and school, they face different obstacles than their traditional counterparts (Bonner et al., 2015). Time management is a significant issue for nontraditional students who struggle to find the balance between maintaining all of their obligations and the ability to perform in school (Ross-Gordon, 2011). Attrition is a significant issue for all students; however, the majority of the research attention is on Black male students and other minority groups. For nontraditional students, these rates are even higher (Goncalves & Trunk, 2014). Few researchers have examined the experiences of the academic talents of Black male students (Bonner et al., 2015; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Goings, 2017; Harper, 2007; Wyatt, 2011). Moving away

from focusing on the problems and challenges encountered by Black males and changing the conversations through counter stories to the successes of Black students who have persisted, even though plagued with the societal challenges, is the focus of this present study.

Research indicates that Black males who obtain college degrees tend to have children who will also earn college degrees (Goncalves & Trunk, 2014). Institutions are focused on a broader picture of overall success, which may neglect the needs of particular groups of students, such as Black males, with more complex issues. The literature has shown that a significant number of Black male students are not successful at gaining postsecondary educational attainment (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2006), but some are. It is important to note that nontraditional Black students often experience hindrances to degree completion (Rosser-Mims, 2014). Rosser-Mims et al. (2014) explained that nontraditional Black students may enter college underprepared for the academic work, all the while having difficulties balancing their family, academic, and work responsibilities. Despite these barriers, Black nontraditional students continue to enter college as an option for upward mobility. Perhaps by investigating these success stories, we might learn more about how to improve the success of this subgroup.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this critical heuristic inquiry was to explore and highlight the stories of successful nontraditional Black males at a Midwestern Predominantly White Institution (PWI) who have persisted toward the completion of an undergraduate degree and underscore what they suggest contributes to their success as students. Understanding and retelling the experiences of these students will help higher education decision-makers enact policies and processes that will enable nontraditional Black male college students to succeed. Gleaning

personal accounts from nontraditional Black male college students about experiences they perceive are associated with their success in college will provide information that can be used to inform strategic planning, policy, and program development around persistence and completion initiatives.

Nature of the Study

Patton (2015) noted that choosing a method for a research study requires the researcher to know the “study’s purpose, agreed-on uses and intended audiences” (p. 17). With these considerations in mind, I chose qualitative research as the research technique for this study. The qualitative research methodology allowed me to gather data in a natural setting, and to collect data first hand and fully describe the experiences of the participants. Merriam (2009) explained, “qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 14). This research sought to generate a “thick description” (Merriam, 2009) of the stories of nontraditional Black successful males. Merriam (2009) explained, “thick description is a term from anthropology and means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated” (p. 43). As I reflected on my experiences as a Black male student in my undergraduate process, I highlighted the similarities and differences I encountered among participants.

Patton (2015) clarified that heuristic inquiry is a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings forth the personal experiences and insights of the researcher. Heuristics is used in qualitative inquiry to discover “the nature and meaning of the phenomenon itself and to illuminate it from direct first-person accounts of individuals who have directly encountered the phenomenon in experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 38). Patton (2015) further discussed the

historical development of heuristics as “a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher” (p. 118). In the 1960s and 1970s, heuristic research was launched as a systematic form for investigating human experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The heuristic tradition is appropriate for this study because, as a Black male student in a predominantly white institution, I have a profound understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, Moustakas (1990) wisely advised, “one must begin with oneself. One’s self-discoveries, awareness, and understandings are the initial steps of the process” (p. 16). Based on my experiences, I brought to this study a unique and personal interest in the phenomenon under study that allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the relevant experiences of nontraditional Black male students’ success. “Heuristics means that case studies illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 44).

Heuristics is a form of subjective inquiry. Gribich (2007) noted, “subjective approaches are defined as those where there is a focus on the researcher and on what takes place within your own thoughts and actions in a specified context” (p. 17). This study relied in part on my thoughts and observations as I collected data. It was essential for me to journal my experiences and reflect on them carefully to ensure I was accurately accounting for the stories the students shared before I analyzed the data I collected. This study utilized interviews and focus groups to satisfy this critical criterion.

Research Questions

The research questions for this heuristic inquiry were:

1. How do nontraditional Black male students define success?

2. What are the college experiences of successful nontraditional Black male students' at Mid Western University (pseudonym)?
3. To what internal and external factors do nontraditional Black male students attribute their college success?

The research questions are useful in connecting the purpose, conceptual framework, and methodology for this qualitative study to substantiate the results of this research study. The conceptual framework is vital to the study. It identifies and further explains the theories, and assumptions that influence the phenomenon in the study. This qualitative study will provide a construct of success for nontraditional Black male students despite the surrounding negatives they experience. Before illuminating the conceptual framework, I first present a historical context of perspectives on the Black Male.

Historical Contexts

Knowing the historical issues that have affected Black males is essential to the context of this study. Racism and prejudice are the belief that one's race, skin tone, or affiliated group, be it of religious, national or ethnic character, is better than others of the human race. This belief has been a part of the American perspective from the European colonization of North America starting in the 17th century (Donlevy, 2005). Individuals of color have persistently endured the impact of oppression, which is evident in biased laws, social practices, and criminal labeling. Racism against Black people can be traced back to when vast numbers of Africans were involuntarily brought to America as slaves, beginning in the 17th century (Donlevy, 2005; O'Connell, 2012). African men, women, and children were deprived of their names, characters, and religions. They were whipped, beaten, persecuted,

and as a rule, lynched or hanged at the impulses of their white authorities, for whom subjection was critical to keeping up their endless properties and land (Donlevy, 2005; Linden, 2000). This history lingers and affects perception and treatment of Black males in our society today. Rooted in the minds and lives of Black individuals is the oppression of Black people of slavery.

An overview of the education of Black males related to access and segregation in education further elucidates their history and the importance of this study. Access to education at all levels in the U.S. is characterized by exclusion and segregation based on gender and race (Bowen & Bok, 1999; Eckel & King, 2004; Smith, 2008). For over a century, public and private White institutions of higher education discriminated against Blacks, denying them access and admission (Bowen & Bok, 1999). Founded in the 1880s in response to this legal practice of discrimination and segregation in higher education, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) assumed the role of providing higher education to Blacks. HBCUs allowed Blacks to attend college, earn undergraduate and graduate degrees, and ultimately serve their communities in professional positions (Bowen & Bok, 1999). Research indicates that most Black male students experience feelings of displacement, disrespect, isolation, and race-related stress while they attend a predominantly white institution PWI (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2006). Black undergraduate male students struggle with conflicting feelings of safety and belonging, institutional climate issues, and personal accountability (Jackson & Moore, 2006). This historical context supports and informs the conceptual frameworks chosen for this study and introduced in the next section.

Conceptual Framework

I drew from several areas of knowledge to inform and support this qualitative inquiry. Maxwell (2013) explained that the theoretical framework is “the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research [are] a key part of your design” (p. 33). Theoretical perspectives used in this inquiry include historical perceptions of the black male, critical race theory, identity development theory, and ecological systems theory. Historical perceptions of Black males provide a sense of their history and positionality in a world that is often quite toxic to who they are. “The notion of positionality rests on the assumption that culture is more than a monolithic entity to which one belongs or not” (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 411). For example, I am a Black male traversing two continents, and the perceptions cast a shadow on me and my every decision. Applying critical race theory to this study enabled me to maintain the authentic voice in expressing the experiences of Black male students who are considered as a marginalized group. While ecological systems theory provides a framework where individuals are understood as functioning within a larger collective group that influences the development of the individual, this model of development will help explain factors of adjustment in the college environment within the context of black male students’ successes. Finally, Anti Deficit Thinking was used to reform the narrative for Black male students. These frameworks are described briefly in the following sections.

Critical Race Theory

The creation of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is credited to Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman. CRT recognizes that racism is embedded in the foundation and system of the American society and emphasizes the effects of race (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) . The

marginalization of people of color is perpetuated by the power structures based on white privilege and white supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 2005). CRT supports authentic voices to express the educational realities and experiences of successful Black male students, who are often considered as a rarity in higher education (Harper, 2010). Critical Race Theory in educational research is valuable because it provides the necessary reasoning for changes in the way that people of color are given purpose (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). McLaren and Giarelli (1995) claimed that critical theory “moves us toward the dark and unexplored corners of our social processes, illuminating structures long-hidden, forces unrecognized, and power struggles embedded in our discourses on schooling and democracy” (p. ix). According to critical race theory, social reality is constructed through the creation of counterstories, which act as the analytical framework used to organize an individual’s experiences.

Additionally, critical race theory maintains that people of color condemn stereotyped depictions made about them by certain factions of society (McGee, 2013; McGee & Martin 2011; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Furthermore, as students of color begin to contribute stories about their experiences with injustice, they begin to analyze their oppression (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Applying Critical Race Theory to this study enabled me to provide authentic voices to express the educational realities and experiences of Black male students who are considered racial minorities. Critical Race Theory strives to support the understanding of the world from the perspective of the oppressed with respect to race (Parker & Lynn, 2002). An approach that seems to show the most influence and impact, using stories and narrative is a way of conveying the need to articulate the experiences of people of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker & Lynn, 2002). For example, Harper (2009) conducted an empirical study using the Critical Race Theory to raise questions about the

social and educational positioning of Black males in America. His counter-narrative on student achievement resulted from individual personal interviews with 143 Black male students at over 30 PWIs across the United States. In the study, he created five composites of why they succeeded, which included themes of refusing to respond to submission and racist stereotyping, confrontations with the repetitive transcription of low expectations for Black male leadership and achievement, and the corresponding rejection of the Black male individual as being lazy.

The critical aspect of the present study is through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which was developed in studies of law where people of color were marginalized. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) helped researchers to focus on how social structures and social impacts shape the education of racialized groups and create educational inequities. They regarded racism as beliefs that are socially allowed and ensure the benefits of white people, which exist because of the mediocre status of people of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The use of counterstories in analyzing higher education's climate provides students of color a voice to tell their narratives involving marginalized experiences. Counterstories can assist in investigating the climate of college campuses and provide areas for further exploration of how an institution can become inclusive and not merely to be diverse (Tate, 1997). Critical race theory serves as a structure and expository instrument for exploring how identity and prejudice influence Black male students' encounters, rendering it an appropriate framework for this study.

Anti-Deficit Thinking

Deficit thinking theory is the notion of racial and social capacity bias to the degree that it attributes unacceptable student success to a student's inherent abilities and her/his

family and cultural background, rather than determining the existence of institutional inadequacies by examining the institution in which the student is enrolled (Harper, 2006, 2009, 2012). Associated with deficit thinking theory is the premise that students of color, particularly those who are considered plagued with cultural deficits such as being first-generation, possess particular intellectual hindrances, behavioral issues, and a lack of motivation that are the cause for low educational attainment (Valencia 2010; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). Deficit thinking theory allows institutions and their constituent faculty and staff to shun their responsibility for student success and instead lay the blame for academic deficiencies and failure on the student. Anti-deficit thinking theory contradicts deficit-thinking theory and identifies factors such as pedagogical practices, societal and environmental elements, as well as institutional, curricular, and co-curricular policies as the factors associated with student success (Gourd & Lightfoot, 2009).

Anti-deficit thinking recognizes the effort required on the part of students to thrive in school, but it also identifies that education is significantly associated with the socio-political and economic conditions of schools (Harper, 2012). Anti-deficit thinking theory supports that the more interactions majority groups have with minority groups, the more comfortable, familiarized, and fair-minded they will become in interacting with them. Deficit thinking has used various explanations, such as inferior culture and social class, mediocre genes, and other unfounded classifications, to account for apparent deficits (Valencia, 2010). Anti-deficit thinking suggests that individuals of socially shattered communities and minority groups are succeeding, and more attention should be afforded to learning from these successes to support others (Harper, 2010, 2012). CRT illuminates systemic issues that exist to harm and oppress Black students from an institutional level while anti-deficit thinking illuminates the skills and abilities that Black students bring to the institution and can use to resist the systemic racism and oppression. Thus these two theories are essential to understanding the experience of Black non-traditional students in terms of their experiences in the university as well as how they define and rise to their success.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined in this study.

Black: A person who possesses ancestry from any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Success: Defining college success is a problem in the first place (Guess, 2008). Therefore, for this study, success is defined as students who have completed at least three years and are in good standing towards graduation.

Predominantly White Institution (PWI): A higher education institution wherein White individuals account for 50% or higher of the student enrollment (Freeman, 1999).

Non-Traditional College Student: A student with any of the following characteristics: age over 24, off-campus residence, more than half-time employment, and lack of dependency, or caring for dependents (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Assumptions

My experiences as a nontraditional Black Male student provides me with empathy for the Black male challenges at PWIs. My identification with these challenges could serve as confining in the study. Because this is a heuristic study, I did not have to set aside my perspective on the study. As a nontraditional Black male student with a commitment to changing the narrative of Black male students in society, I needed to acknowledge my bias. I must recognize any bias from personal experiences and put aside these biases during the study.

As I conducted this research, there were some assumptions that I brought to the study. For example, I presumed that many Black male students who persist through the undergraduate degree have a set type of support or motivational systems, which aids in the continued pursuit of advanced education. Additionally, I assumed Black students may feel a sense of devaluing due to negative societal outlooks, which often see Black males as an inferior group of individuals. Lastly, I assumed that Black male students who are advancing within the system of higher education are likely to have an understanding of the importance of education and are steadfast in achieving such goals. These assumptions contribute to the my passion and connection to the success of nontraditional Black Male students attending a PWI in the Midwest of the United States.

Other assumptions involve the study's design and data collection about nontraditional Black male students' success in obtaining an undergraduate degree at a predominantly white institution. First, I assumed that the participants would be open and honest during our dialogue and give a high-level effort throughout the interviewing process. Secondly, that my data collection was valid and reliable to capture the rich, thick information needed for the study. Also, because, as the researcher, my ethnicity, academic, and personal background are highly paralleled to the research intended participants, I assumed I would be able to connect with the students on an individual and intimate level, resulting in subjective as well as objective findings. Finally, I also assumed that while the investigation focuses on nontraditional Black male students' experience at a Midwestern PWI, the feedback provided would be valuable information for higher education professionals and institutions that serve this population across the country.

Study Limitations

The present study has limitations. The study was limited to one institution of higher education, in one region of the United States. The focus was on nontraditional Black male students who had completed at least three years at the institution. Furthermore, the research focused on 14 nontraditional Black students, therefore limiting the number of participants' experiences to be examined across the nontraditional definition. Finally, the study might not be replicable with the use of the heuristic approach, since my experience of being educated in a Midwestern institute may not reflect experiences from a different geographical location. These limitations are elaborated upon further in Chapter 3.

Each choice that I made for this study served to offer delimitations in an effort to narrow the scope of the study. Given the method of inquiry, the intent was to produce in-depth exploration of the phenomena. The intent is not to generalize all nontraditional Black male students' experiences, but rather to contribute to a greater understanding of the experiences of these students. My decision to obtain data from one institution in the Midwest was based on my interest and life as a Black male in the Midwest. Additionally, by selecting Black males, my rationale for this was simply to change the image that is portrayed continuously about Black males and success. There is an inherent need to share the positive stories of Black male students. The study is not focused on Black female collegiate, traditional college students, or Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), as ample research exists for those topics and indicates progressive success for those groups or students attending those locations.

Study Significance

The purpose of the present study was to illuminate the positive aspects of nontraditional Black male student success. Nontraditional Black students' access to higher education has grown in the United States but not in proportion to the population. The present study is significant because it provides insight into the lived experiences of nontraditional Black male students whose opinions are rarely sought and whose voices are often silenced concerning academic achievement. We know little about nontraditional Black males and how they attribute their success (Bridges, 2010; Brown & Donnor, 2011; Garibaldi, 1992; Jackson & Moore, 2006). Looking at the experiences that aid Black nontraditional male students in academic success will provide pathways into how to better serve this population.

The purpose of this present study was to provide realistic reflections that accurately communicate the experience lived by nontraditional Black male students. According to Washington (2013), Black individuals as a culture have been struggling for equality of education. Therefore, the negative assumptions and images that are researched continuously on Black male students rather than access to the education system may be responsible for the inequitable outcomes of Black males (Allen, 1992; Cameron & Heckman, 2001; Farmer & Hope, 2015). The findings will add to the field by increasing awareness for the community at large concerning the biased assumptions many hold about Black males' success in higher education. The study will provide vital knowledge for educators about culture, ethnicity, and persistence in Black male student achievement. The present study will provide an understanding to individuals such as university administrators, professors, parents, and policymakers in their search for a more in-depth understanding of the many factors that may influence Black male students' path to persistence in higher education.

Conclusion

The voices of nontraditional Black males in higher education need to be heard. This qualitative inquiry highlighted personal viewpoints and understandings of Black nontraditional male success and the college experience at a PWI. The literature regularly describes the experiences of the Black male students' deficiencies, and the experiences of successful Black males are often not present in the literature. There is a need to understand the experiences of nontraditional Black males, not just the challenges that may arise in PWIs; but also the strategies used for overcoming those obstacles. Ecological systems theory and critical race theory provided a framework

for understanding the challenges that are placed on this population but can also amplify their voices through sharing their stories and experiences on a PWI college campus. These theories also provided depth in understanding their struggles and needs. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature that focuses on dynamics that have a bearing on the issue of Black nontraditional male success.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This qualitative study's purpose was to explore and share the stories of nontraditional Black male students about to what they attribute their success and their experiences as a student. A significant goal of this study was to change the perception of Black male students in higher education, more specifically nontraditional Black male students, from negative to more favorable as it relates to the achievement of which Black males are capable. This literature review supports this study of documentation and synthesis of research around themes that are significant to nontraditional Black male college student success. The limited range of current research specifically examined factors of success for non-traditional Black male college.

Exploring how Black males are successful in college is necessary given that researchers have traditionally concentrated on their struggles and deficits (Goings, 2015; Harper, 2015). In the literature on high-achieving Black males, researchers have found that these men have been successful for a variety of reasons such as peer support (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Harper, 2006), ability to develop stereotype management strategies (McGee & Martin, 2011), supportive faculty (Bonner et al., 2015; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001), and family support (Freeman, 1999; Palmer et al., 2010). While scholars have investigated the academic and social experiences of high-achieving Black males at predominantly White Institutions (PWIs; e.g., Harper, 2006) and HBCUs (e.g., Goings, 2015), there has been limited discourse about the experiences of successful nontraditional Black male college students. Learning from the experiences of these highly successful students will inform

colleges about the academic and social needs of their nontraditional Black male student population.

This chapter reviews literature related to Black males in higher education. I explicitly searched for literature about the experiences of non-traditional Black male students. I conducted a review of the literature using a variety of accessible databases, including Educational Resource Information Center, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and WorldCat, and keywords of nontraditional Black male students, Black males in higher education, nontraditional African American students, and high-achieving Black collegians. When possible, the search was limited to 2001 to present to review the most recent literature on the subjects. There are exceptions cited outside of this timeframe to include seminal work in case literature was limited for the subject content. This chapter reviews a broad spectrum of existing literature on non-traditional Black male students in higher education. The themes used to organize this review provide both a theoretical and practical basis for the study.

The chapter is divided into three main sections; an overview of research on Black males in higher education, threats to Black male student success, and the conceptual frameworks guiding this study: the theories of critical race, deficit thinking, anti-deficit, and asset based perspective.

Black Males in Higher Education: Success Factors and Challenges

In the literature on Black males in higher education, the historic focus tends to be disparities by ethnic groups and the gender gap in enrollment for Black men and women (Allen, 1992; Cuyjet, 2006a; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001). Studies have examined factors including commitment of universities in providing academic support and services for students of color (Gibbs, 1988; Harper, 2006; Palmer et al., 2010; Strayhorn, 2008) and

creating a welcoming educational atmosphere (Allen, 1992; Brown, 2011; Clark et al., 2012; Noguera, 2003). Further research examined variables related to the Black experience, such as feelings of uncertainty, segregation, and sense of belonging (Cuyjet, 2006a, 2006b; Strayhorn, 2008) and faculty mistreatment (Garibaldi, 1992; Harper, 2012; Jackson & Moore, 2006). Today, researchers are focusing on specific factors that impact Black male students' experiences, rather than an overall Black students study incorporating specific aspects to focus on particular groups.

Cuyjet (2006b) wrote about how to help African American men succeed on college campuses. The research changed the focus from the inadequacies the students brought to colleges and universities and placed a charge on finding solutions to why Black male undergraduates fail to succeed at institutions. After the completion of work by Cuyjet, the research examined institutional practices that impacted success outcomes in Black male students, such as the use of academic support (Brown, 2011; Cuyjet, 2006a, 2006b; Harper, 2006; Palmer & Young, 2008), identity development (Harper, 2006), participation in purposeful co-curricular activities (Cuyjet, 2006b; Harper, 2008; Harper et al., 2004), collegiate athletics participation (Brown & Donnor, 2011), and peer development (Strayhorn, 2013).

Success at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)

The majority of research on Black male students in Higher Education has studied the population's negative experiences at PWIs, concentrating on the impact of racial battleground fatigue (Brown, 2011). Although Allen (1992) maintained that Black students experience significant racial microaggression and lack of support services at PWIs, Harper (2012) contended that Black men have indeed persisted and excelled within this institutional

context, despite currently established obstacles. Harper (2006) wanted to identify the roles played by Black male peers; the channels from which peer support is obtained, and if there was any supportive evidence of Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) "acting white" hypothesis, and internalized racism among Black male students. During interviews, participants reported that they intentionally accessed healthy peer relations through memberships in fraternities and campus clubs, and by attending orientation programs; peer interaction and support were recognized as significantly enriching to their collegiate experiences. Additionally, these students used their campus involvement as a means of advancing Black student concerns on their respective campuses. Much like the Black men in Harper's 2009 study, high self-efficacy and strong Black identity were prevalent in the men who successfully navigated the microaggressive environments in which they studied and lived. These ventures are easily incorporated for regular students but become problematic for our nontraditional population.

Participants in Bridges' 2010 study conducted in a Southeastern PWI employed psychological distancing to combat discriminatory campus practices known to hinder success. Six men who participated in three focus groups stated that they deemed the campus unwelcoming to Blacks. To navigate the environment, these men ignored intolerance by engaging psychological distancing and encouraged their sense of identity by reflecting upon the accomplishments of their race, by self-motivating themselves to persist. The psychological impact of this practice may be harmful; one participant explained that he was "definitely changed" by his experiences, and additionally affirmed a need to "put up kind of a wall" (p. 24).

Williamson (2010) found that African and Caribbean men described significantly higher levels of success with their overall academic experiences in comparison to their

African American counterparts. This mixed methods study of 99 Black males majoring in STEM fields at a PWI examined data gathered from the Academic Integration Scale and individual interviews, through the lenses of Ogbu and Simons' (1998) cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance. Black men were deemed as having the lowest levels of engagement with faculty. Interestingly, despite ethnicity, all participants recognized the family as being "a pivotal force" in their educational success and instrumental in sharing encouragement and resources. The finding refutes Ogbu and Simons' (1998) hypothesis that Black students receive less encouragement and support to succeed in college than non-voluntary minorities. Unlike in the studies by Harper (2006, 2009), and Bridges (2010), the men in Williamson's (2010) study used Black Distancing and elected not to interact and therefore did not benefit from supportive same-race peer relationships. However, family interaction played a meaningful role in their success, suggesting that supportive relationships for Black males at PWIs are a critical component to their achievement, whether those relationships are forged with family or friends. In contrast to Williamson's (2010) results, Strayhorn (2008) looked at data from the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) and concluded that Black men who mingled with peers from several different races and backgrounds were likely to display a sturdier sense of belonging to the campus, as being linked to academic success, a concept reinforced by the literature on Black males (Strayhorn, 2008). As stated, there are several factors that Black male students attribute to progress through the post-secondary realm.

Barriers to Success for Black Male Students

The literature points to explicit barriers erected in higher education that many Black male students encounter (Cuyjet, 2006a; Harper, 2006). These barriers include limited

financial resources and inadequate academic preparation that results in low self-esteem, lack of mentors, and an overall lack of self-concept as to how to be a successful student in college. Although the study of these barriers seeks to identify and examine reasons why Black male college students may fail in higher education, they all stem from research that is rooted in the deficit way of thinking.

Allen (1992) conducted a national study of 1,800 Black students (872 attending PWIs and 928 enrolled at HBCUs), which investigated how students' family and community experiences, campus experiences, and individual personality were associated with outcomes connected to academic achievement, social involvement, and occupational aspirations. Using survey data from the National Study of Black College Students (NSBCS), this quantitative, multivariate study found that both individual and institutional characteristics was a significant predictor of outcomes in these three areas. The findings suggest that a student's interpretation of and reaction to the stressors connected with an institutional setting determined level of achievement. Considering those findings, when the predictor of campus racial make-up was combined, students at HBCUs outgained their counterparts attending PWIs as measured by the three outcomes. Finally, previous research findings validate this assertion: Black students at PWIs experience microaggression that impedes their achievement, in comparison to the supportive HBCU campuses that cultivate Black collegians' success (Allen, 1992).

The obstacles that Black males face in college have been well documented. One of the prominent challenges researchers contend that Black males have to deal with is attending underperforming elementary schools, which leaves many underprepared to attend college (Bianco et al., 2011; Ford, 2014; Toldson, 2008). In particular, Black males are

overrepresented in special education classrooms (Ford & Whiting, 2011). In Scott et al.'s (2013) analysis of college scholarship essays from Black males, the researchers found that the limited access to culturally competent teachers, high educational expectations, mentorship, and family and community support served as obstacles for their high school completion. Subsequently, the Black males who do overcome these obstacles may also face challenges in college.

On college campuses, researchers have found that Black males encounter a high number of challenges that impede their academic success, which include but are not limited to academic under-preparedness (Robinson & Hope, 2013), racial discrimination (Banks & Banks, 2010), underutilization of campus resources (Kimbrough & Harper, 2006), and lack of access to financial aid (Palmer et al., 2009). These barriers, in conjunction with the K-12 barriers previously mentioned, have contributed to only 5.43% of Black males enrolled at a degree-granting institution, only a 0.86% increase since 1976 (Wood & Palmer, 2014).

The challenges Black males encounter in college are severe and are worth investigating. Harper (2012) has created a line of research that examines the academic and social experiences of high-achieving Black males. Within this research, scholars seek to change deficit narratives about Black males and investigate how these students are successful in higher education. Interestingly, this research has been focused on traditional college-aged Black males. Thus, there is a gap in the literature on the academic success and social experiences of high achieving nontraditional Black male collegians.

Guy (2014) symbolically described the plight of adult Black males in society and education as parallel to a salmon racing upstream against the current, trying to survive despite life-threatening obstacles and predators. In essence, Guy's representation can also be

applied to how researchers have examined the experiences of Black males in adult education. There is more focus on the barriers Black men face going against the current than examining those who successfully navigated the rocky waters. In the existing adult education literature, researchers have examined the obstacles Black males face when they enter college and continuing education programs as adults. For instance, Miller et al. (2014) studied the academic, social, and societal challenges formerly incarcerated Black men experience when seeking to complete their GED. Moreover, Rosser-Mims et al. (2014) examined the reentry experiences of Black males and found a lack of role models and financial resources, as well as the inability to sustain a work-life balance served as barriers to success.

Although the challenges Black males face in adult education are worth investigating, exclusively focusing on problems reinforces stereotypical notions of who Black men are and what they aspire to become. To challenge the current narrative and investigate the layered experiences of Black men, researchers must begin to highlight those who have overcome challenges and succeeded later in life. These additional data show how Black men can be successful at any age and in a variety of circumstances. Through these stories, researchers, practitioners, and other educational stakeholders can begin to understand the academic and social supports needed to retain and graduate all their students, regardless of age.

Threats to Success for Nontraditional Black Students

The use of “non-traditional students” as defined in Chapter 1 is common in educational research and policy-making to refer to individuals with socio-demographic features that are different from traditionally defined participants in higher education. As institutions of higher education are increasing student diversity, the increase allows for a promoted awareness of researchers to explore issues mainly relevant to the growing amount

of students who land on campuses through a wide array of initiatives, leading to evidence-based policies and practices that support their well-being and achievement (Kim et al., 2010). Adebayo (2008) suggested that non-traditional students are inclined to face unique concerns that influence their educational and mental health needs. For example, students who have families or work responsibilities may face increased external demands in comparison to traditional students (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). Ways to reduce the struggle between working and studying are therefore, vital for their success (Adebayo, 2008). However, many question the practicality of the phrase “non-traditional students” in research observing the experience of students from various backgrounds (Greenland, 1993; Kim et al., 2010; Smit, 2012). In particular, the changeable definitions used in research have led to little agreement regarding who non-traditional students are (Kim et al., 2010; Johnson & Nussbaum, 2012). The use of the term may also risk generalizing features of some groups of students to others, due to the use of a single overarching term to refer to diverse groups that may potentially have very different needs (Smit, 2012; Witkowsky et al., 2016).

There is a lack of literature on the understanding of nontraditional Black students (Ross-Gordon, 2011; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000; Rosser-Mims et al., 2014). Ross-Gordon and Brown-Haywood found that many of their 19 Black adult participants credited their lack of maturity, sense of career trajectory, and strong desire to seek real-world experience as the reasons they did not succeed in college during their first attempt. While the participants in this study overcame these challenges and succeeded in college, they also noted that race and gender bias served as barriers in their interactions with faculty. This trend is alarming and confirms other studies that have found that Black students experience racism and discrimination on college campuses (Banks & Banks, 2010; Fischer, 2007).

Sealey-Ruiz's (2013) case study on Black college nontraditional mothers found that participants were stereotyped because of their status as Black mothers. As one participant, Lisa, stated, "Why Black women gotta have just one story? It is like if one Black woman does something negative, suddenly all Black women do that thing" (pp. 13–14). Lisa's sentiment underscores a more extensive issue where Blacks continue to be stereotyped and looked at as the problem. Lisa's narrative reinforces the notion that Blacks are continuously depicted by negative stereotypes and deficit thinking in society (Strayhorn et al., 2013; Terry et al., 2014). Similarly, nontraditional Black male students face these obstacles on their white college campuses.

Although there has been limited literature on Black male nontraditional students, a recent volume in *New Directions for Adult Education* entitled, *Swimming Upstream: Black Males in Adult Education* provided some insight into the experiences of nontraditional Black male students and the challenges they face (Rosser-Mims et al., 2014). For instance, Rosser-Mims et al. (2014) found that having limited access to financial aid and other monetary resources, role models, and maintaining a work-life balance served as barriers to Black adult male students success. While the studies in that volume explored the experiences of nontraditional Black males, none of these studies examined the experiences of high-achieving nontraditional Black males.

Drayton et al. (2014) stated:

A reoccurring theme in this capacity is the harmful impact of the negative stereotyping and the pathological construction of Black male identities. Expanding research on high achievers to diverse educational settings would not only disrupt this construction but also offer strategies for overcoming difficult situations. (p. 90)

Therefore, this study and others (Goings, 2015) are timely given the call by Drayton et al. (2014) for researchers to focus on high-achieving Black males, which is essential to understanding how Black males succeed in higher education.

Higher education has a major problem on its hands: how to deal with nontraditional aged Black males in higher education. According to the Pew Research Center report in 2016, more than 36% of whites ages 25 and older have bachelor's degrees, compared with 23% of Blacks. Colleges struggle to graduate Black male students, ages 25 years old and upwards when compared with their similar white male counterparts. Solving retention and completion issues are paramount if institutions hope to broaden access, completion, and equity for all of its students. In order to achieve their goals, the following barriers must be addressed concerning Black males: (1) lack of access to culturally relevant pedagogy, (2) systematic denial of mental health services, (3) social isolation, and (4) lack of peer group support during college tenure.

Nontraditional Black male students face numerous challenges when they attend college. Ferlin McGaskey (2015) said some of the unique problems Black males face are "financial constraints, work-life balance, and household management." (p. 189). Multitasking multiple identities creates many obstacles, such as finding affordable child care and finding sufficient time after work to attend school. According to Wood and Williams (2013), Black men in colleges are more likely to be low-income, have dependents, be married, and delay enrollment into higher education. Coupled with unequal education in the K-12 system, along with insufficient services in higher education, many Black men do not graduate in the current average completion time of six years, or they do not graduate at all. The reasons for their troubles have been misunderstood mainly due to stereotypes and inadequate studies to

support their achievement. For example, Black males are systematically denied mental health services in higher education. This is problematic, although some argue that students from low-income backgrounds, many of whom are Black men, do not use mental health services in college. The truth is that many of the colleges where these non-traditional students attend do not have mental health facilities to accommodate their psychological and emotional needs (Bridges, 2010; Clark et al., 2012).

According to the 2016 *Too Distressed to Learn* report, 58% of four-year colleges and universities have on-site psychiatric facilities appropriate for treating mental illness. Black males attending these schools face multiple risk factors for poor mental health, such as housing instability, food insecurity, and depression. Social isolation at home and in school hinders many Black males from forming healthy relationships with faculty, peers, and even family (Brooms & Davis, 2017). For example, family members may criticize them for ignoring their responsibilities; whereas, at school, their out-of-school lives may make it difficult to devote themselves to school entirely. As a result, some college faculty members may view their Black male students through a deficit lens, which reinforces low-achievement expectations.

Higher educational institutions have seen an increase in nontraditional Black college students, primarily and specifically males (Adams & Corbett, 2010; Bonner et al., 2015; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Goncalves & Trunk, 2014). The research that exists for these students suggests disparate outcomes (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Taniguchi, & Kaufman, 2005). However, there is limited research investigating the academic and social experiences of nontraditional Black males and almost no research investigating how they succeed. As universities seek to improve the academic retention and graduation rates of Black males,

nontraditional Black male undergraduates and their success strategies must be included in the discussion. The following conceptual framework is used to guide the present study in identifying the success strategies of non-traditional Black male students.

Conceptual Framework

The frameworks used in the present study focus on the beliefs and assumptions of the researcher, thoughts and concepts, empirical knowledge, and existing literature (Maxwell, 2013). Identifying a framework to explain the experiences of Black male students, in essence, attempts to integrate key aspects of information logically. McLaren and Giarelli (1995) contended that theory grounds how researchers identify, name, interpret, and write about the unique experiences. Therefore, a theory was an appropriate framework for the research. Critical race theory serves as the means of exploration for this study, providing a tool to examine how race, gender, and social class converge within the counter-narratives of Black college males (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

The foundation of critical race theory is traced to Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which focuses exclusively on legal issues and is less radical. CLS proposes that the consequences of litigation and other acts of the court are often generally political and attend to the interest of the wealthy and powerful. Critical race theory allows for extensive examination and encourages participants to express themselves and share their stories of overcoming adversity. Critical race theory is defined as a multi-faceted movement concerned with providing a means of examining and eliminating racism, control, and privilege within the United States legal system (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Ladson- Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race theory has since exceeded its legal roots and is

currently used to examine power structures in a myriad of other fields, including those in health care and education. Anzaldua (1990, as cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) argued that researchers investigating underrepresented, marginalized groups of people should seek new ways to aid in the understanding of their experiences. Well-known in the late 1970s, critical race theory ventured to quicken progress practices of the 1960s by declaring that racism is a perpetual wrong of the American society which must be recognized to establish equality as a part of the civil rights movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). However, critical race theory is considered a social movement, with a combination of different theories, social crusades, and philosophical reflections (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Delgado and Stefancic (2013) explained that critical race theory draws its balance as a conceptual framework and means of exploring race, power, and racism from the viewpoint of oppressed groups. It has been linked to reformists and significant theorists such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dolores Huerta (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013), incorporating history, construction of social roles, and a consistent challenge to the oppression of marginalized people.

Critical race theory has been utilized to examine disparities in health care, mental health, politics, sociology, feminism, and student affairs theories (Tate, 1997; Yosso & Solórzano, 2002). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) first used CRT in educational settings as a powerful analytic and conceptual tool for understanding inequity, increasing education research examining the experience of dismissed students. CRT reinforces as a research method explaining inequities in higher education as well (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Furthermore, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) compared critical race theory legal literature to the inequalities in education and expressed the following viewpoint.

1. Race remains to be a significant factor in the U.S.
2. U.S. society is predicated upon property rights; and that the “intersection” of the two “creates an analytic tool for understanding social (and school) inequity” (p. 48).

Given the centrality of race in the present examination of the experiences of non-traditional men of color, it is a necessity for the use of a critical race theoretical framework. From a CRT perspective, the lack of opportunity for quality education and schooling is not coincidental but directly relates to the interaction of the socioeconomic forces that have frustrated Blacks’ efforts to escape poverty and its social complications (Howard, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2005). Therefore, Black male experiences in college would be incomplete without focusing on the experience of Blacks in the public school system. The low representation of Black males in college could be attributed in part to systemic barriers such as enrollment in poor school districts, high dropout rates in middle and high schools, high rates of incarceration, high rates of homicide, and chronic health problems (Howard, 2014). The Black men who matriculate through college often struggle with the rigor of academic challenges if they were not adequately prepared during the formative years of their schooling (Cuyjet, 1997, 2006a). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) identified how racism in the United States affected the economic and social development of Blacks and Latinos, and in turn, their educational development (Brown, 2011; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; Iruka et al., 2015; O’Connell, 2012; Patterson, 2002; Strayhorn, 2010). By using CRT to identify these barriers, we are better able to identify the strategies used to overcome societal deficits.

The researchers state White flight and the failing ability to recognize the lack of access to acceptable educational settings for minorities is the main reason for Black students’

hardship. The category of class and gender-based explanations are not enough to explain the difference, which occurs within the school experience and performance. Thus, perhaps the most compelling aspect of their argument supporting CRT treatment is race (Tate, 1997); for example, the notion that middle-class White students perform better academically than Blacks within the same class socially. Therefore, there is a vast range of intersections, such as race, class, gender, and other types of marginalized status, that are critical to understanding educational disparities. Moreover, the voices of oppressed people within the educational environment must be heard as a way of creating social justice and reform (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Many researchers have responded to Ladson-Billings and Tate's call (1995) for the usage of CRT for exploring injustices in education based on race and class and as an outlet to eliminate discrimination through its social justice model. Many researchers have resourcefully utilized CRT while investigating educational pedagogy, curriculum, practice, and policy; marginalized student experiences; the achievement gap between students; and overall educational outcomes (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Tate, 1997).

A critical race theory analysis can be used to embody the voices of all people, as well as to emancipate the experiences, beliefs, and truths of marginalized individuals. The use of counter-storytelling provides an outlet for young men to express their experiences with racism not offered by the institution. Critical race theory researchers have examined a wide range of issues including curriculum design, financial aid policy, student experiences, access, athletic coaching, educational progress, transfer student process, and diversity (Farmer & Hope, 2015; Harper, 2009, 2012; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Harper (2009) utilized a combination of stories to express the successful experiences of the participants in his study to counter the negativity of the literature on Black males. These men know the microaggressions on their campuses and, in turn, refute them by immersing themselves into their campus and achieving academically. Harper (2009) noted that deficit-informed research continuously upheld marginalization and silenced the practical knowledge of people of color. While the use of CRT as a theoretical tool for analysis in higher education has begun to expand, very few studies have examined the experiences of successful nontraditional Black male students.

Deficit Thinking

Deficit thinking theory is grounded in racial and societal bias to the degree that it attributes unfavorable student success to a student's innate aptitudes, such as family and cultural background, rather than inspecting the institution in which the student is enrolled. Related to deficit thinking theory is the basis that students of color, primarily those who are financially underprivileged with social deficits like being the first generation, possess specific academic hindrances, as well as behavioral concerns and a lack of enthusiasm to learn that is the cause of low educational attainment (Valencia, 2010). Deficit thinking was developed at a time when other social construction expressions emerged, such as, "culturally disadvantaged child," "cultural deprivation," and "accumulated environmental deficits" (Valencia, 2010). Deficit thinking contends that ethnic minorities and the economically disadvantaged are the cause of their own socio-economic and educational attainment issues. It is in that regard that anti-deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010) is used as the conceptual framework for this study of Black male college students' perspectives on experiences that have contributed to their college success.

Anti-deficit thinking emerged as an opposition to deficit thinking that contends ethnic minorities and the poor were the reason for their own socio-economic and educational achievement issues. Anti-deficit thinking theory challenges deficit thinking theory and identifies factors such as pedagogical practices, societal, and environmental factors. When institutions adopt an anti-deficit approach to educating students, they are willing to implement assessments to understand their student bodies better and subsequently plan appropriate instruction, interventions, and programs to address areas of deficiency and support students in general. The notion that institutions need to address the academic accomplishment issues of students by enhancing their educational support structures is present in anti-deficit thinking. Just as in critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013), measures are taken to strengthen the Black community, rather than eliminate racism.

Anti-deficit thinking acknowledges the effort necessary on the part of students to succeed in school. However, it also recognizes that educability is appreciably associated with the socio-political and economic conditions of schools (Harper, 2012). Anti-deficit thinking theory supports that the more contact majority groups have with minority groups, the more comfortable, familiarized, and fair-minded they will become in interacting with them. Deficit thinking has used various explanations, such as inferior culture and social class, mediocre genes, and other unfounded classifications to account for apparent deficits (Valencia, 2010). Anti-deficit thinking suggests individuals of socially blighted communities and minority groups are succeeding, and more attention should be afforded to learning from these successes to support others (Harper, 2010, 2012). Harper (2010) cautioned against relying on existing theories and long-standing conceptual frameworks to repeatedly examine deficits rather than discovering through an anti-deficit approach how specific student groups have

managed to be successful. This study discounts deficit thinking theory to the point that it negates ideology around genetics being a factor of the disproportional college attainment among Black males, and it refutes the notion that Black male college student attainment lags behind all genders and ethnic groups because of an endemic culture of low motivation.

Harper (2010) opposed policy reports and published studies on Black STEM students who continue to concentrate on determining why there are student attainment disparities with White and Asian students. However, research emphasized the importance of using an anti-deficit focus to examine not the “why” but the “how” successful Black students are. The present study is to investigate an opposing school of thought to deficit thinking and constructed to highlight factors associated with Black male student success as a means of using the stories of successful Black male college students.

Anti-deficit Framework

The framework developed by Harper (2012) discussed how the pre-college experiences, along with involvement both academically and socially, impacted student engagement and retention at a university. Harper’s (2006, 2007, 2009, 2012) research of Black males from an anti-deficit achievement perspective provided a balanced understanding of the lives of Black men in college and universities who enrolled, retained, and persisted toward graduation. Harper’s (2003) research was developed from an original inquiry to gain insight into the student perceptions on opportunities they believed were afforded to them due to their involvement in on-campus experiences. His research evolved, and he used the data from the same participants to explore same-race peer support groups, the role racial identity played in the engagement in organizations, to identify what the students gained from their involvement on campus, and how the relationships were negotiated at six predominantly

White institutions (2006, 2007, 2009). Harper's research on high-achieving Black males in college has provided predominantly White colleges and universities with necessary information on involvement both in and out-of-class, the need for support from parents, faculty, administrators, and peers, and insight on what these Black males did in order to succeed. Harper (2012) argued that to assist Black males in college better, there is a need to understand from their perspectives, what the institution needs to do to foster a greater sense of community, support, and academic achievement.

Harper (2012) started to collect data in 2005 for the largest-known empirical investigation of Black male undergraduates to study Black males in a variety of college and university settings. In this study, he developed the anti-deficit achievement framework, which derived from research on Black males in college, as well as theories from sociology, psychology, gender studies, and education (Harper, 2012). He focused on the pre-college socialization and readiness (pre-college support programs, parental involvement, and support, among others), the college achievement (classroom experiences, out of class experiences, and enriching educational experiences) and the post-college success. Within each pipeline, a group of research questions was made available for future research to better understand Black male student success in college.

Harper's anti-deficit achievement approach, how Black males succeed (2006, 2007, 2008, 2012) research was reviewed because it used an anti-deficit achievement perspective. Harper's perspective reversed questions commonly asked about educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and Black male student attrition. Within this perspective, Harper focused on highlighting the policies, programs, and resources that support Black male success in college. He uncovered

how involvement in and out of the classroom afforded access to opportunities for leadership and involvement on campus.

Harper's framework is especially important because it provides a foundation for this study. Thus, in order to provide context to the literature review, this chapter begins with an overview of Harper's research. Through qualitative research, Harper (2004) interviewed 32 high-achieving African-American males from six predominantly White institutions in the Midwest: University of Illinois, Indiana University, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, The Ohio State University, and Purdue University. The participant selection criteria were provided to high-ranking university officials, who nominated the participants. These included Black males with the following attributes: a 3.0 grade point average, an established record of involvement in multiple organizations, earned admiration of peers (as determined by peer elections to campus leadership positions), developed meaningful relationships with faculty and high ranking campus administrators, participated in enriching educational experiences (e.g., student abroad, internship programs, learning communities, and summer research programs), and earned numerous awards and honors for college achievement (Harper, 2004). Harper (2004) was interested in gaining insight into student perceptions on opportunities they believed were afforded to them due to their involvement in on-campus experiences. Harper examined the extent to which students benefitted from relationships they established with faculty and administrators and the extent to which their experiences contributed to the building of skills and competencies necessary for in-class learning. Through semi-structured individual interviews, Harper identified seven categories that captured the experiences of the 32 high achieving students. The categories were (a) success stimuli and support services, (b) involvement impetus, (c) uniqueness and

underrepresentation, (d) perks and privileges, (e) practical competences, (f) stressors of professionalism, and (g) a love/hate relationship with their university.

Harper (2004) also found the 32 high achievers reported how their spiritual connection to God played a major role in their overall success. The support they received from their parents and peers were also major sources of motivation. The higher achievers felt indebted to the older student leaders who reached out to them while they were transitioning to college. That relationship and understanding of carrying on a legacy were ingrained through their involvement. The unique aspect of the high achievers was that they represented a small portion of Black male students involved on campus. While their peers were focused on sports, dating, and hanging out, the study participants were focused on making a difference in their community and representing a population that was underrepresented. The participants' definitions of high achieving differed from their respective peers. For the high achievers, instead of just grades, money, and material possessions, they identified campus involvement, community uplift, and long-term career success beyond the undergraduate years as indicators of achievement (Harper, 2004). Harper's (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2012) research of Black males from an anti-deficit achievement perspective provided a balanced understanding of the lives of Black men in colleges and universities who have navigated successfully.

More research is needed to share new stories that counter the occurrence of deficit dialogue on Black male students if any significant social or educational change is to be realized for this population (Brown & Donnor, 2011). Brown (2011) stated in his historical analysis of the works on Black males from the 1930s to present, that he found an abundance of the same discussion that centers on the extreme and societal deficits of Black males.

Brown mentioned the need for something different, anti-deficit inquiries as a way to differentiate and develop studies upon the existing recurring narratives of “inattentiveness,” “incapable,” and “in crisis.” This dialogue on anti-deficit thinking concerning Black males aligns with Palmer and Young (2009), who also asserted there is a need to end the restricted, deficit labels attributed to Black males.

Asset Based Perspective

Years later, Harper (2012) added to Allen’s (1992) argument, centering on success factors across institutional context, through a qualitative study documenting 219 Black males’ academic achievement at 43 colleges and universities across 20 states. Adding a voice to the quantifiable data, and departing from the tendency of framing the retention of Black male students from a deficit model, the study explored institutional programs, peer and familial relationships, and the effects of individual prowess in garnering social capital in support of the participant’s academic goals. The study was done through a chain of individual interviews and focus groups with the anti-deficit achievement framework. The Black males in Harper’s (2012) study shared the factors attributed to their success, which included: their ability to successfully maneuver through racially charged environments, being engaged on campus through leadership opportunities, having developed meaningful relationships with peers and mentors, and receiving sufficient family and spiritual support. Some participants also correlated college transition and pre-college programs and scholarship opportunities with their retention, achievement, and attainment. Allen (1992) stated that “ a major challenge confronting U.S. higher education is how best to replicate and expand examples of Black student college success” (p. 41). Harper (2012) replied, through an

examination of the lived experiences of successful Black male students, analyzing the factors, those internal and external, that related to their achievement.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed research that investigated various factors in Black male success, with a focus on PWIs. Contrary to the “deficit literature” prevalent in the media, Black males succeed in college despite alarming challenges. Black male students are active and successful at recognizing and getting assistance from caring factors such as their peers, mentors, and faculty for support and guidance. Thriving Black men utilize institutional academic assistance and remediation programs to strengthen their academic capabilities. They use their family members to provide resources and encouragement, and above all use their spiritual base for inner strength. Regardless of the racial microaggressions or the political reaction of the campuses, Black men are resilient and find ways to become involved and engaged as student leaders.

Moreover, the literature reveals that Black men apply exhaustive psychic energy to succeed in postsecondary education through a combination of coping strategies and self-efficacy. However, few studies focus on the experience of non-traditional Black men and their success. Further, while growing attention has been focused on Black male success at HBCUs, we need to continue to focus their successes at PWIs. Harper (2012) provided one of the few examples that aimed to understand the process utilized by the individual, such as building social capital on campus. The following section details the methodology for the study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 highlights the design and procedures that were used to guide this study of Black nontraditional male students. The study explored the achievements of nontraditional Black male students nearing the completion of an undergraduate degree at a Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest. As presented in Chapter 2, the majority of previous studies take a deficit approach to Black men's experience in higher education, focusing on educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and Black male student attrition (Eunyoung & Hargrove, 2013; Harper, 2012; Palmer et al., 2009). This study used a strengths-based approach to describe successful Black males while giving voice to their experiences as nontraditional students. This study used a qualitative inquiry to explore the experiences at a PWI for nontraditional Black males and identify the reasons for the students' perseverance and success.

The study explored the following research questions:

1. How do nontraditional Black male students define success?
2. What are the college experiences of successful nontraditional Black male students' at Mid Western University (pseudonym)?
3. To what internal and external factors do nontraditional Black male students attribute their college success?

This examination provides insight into the lived experiences of nontraditional Black male students who have persisted for at least three years and are nearing the completion of an undergraduate degree. These voices are rarely sought for their opinions, and often their

voices are silenced about their academic achievement (Harper, 2015; Parker et al., 2016; Wang et al., 1994). The importance of this study is to provide insight to practitioners to better understand their students and the systems that help them succeed. This study gives realistic reflections that communicate the lived experiences of nontraditional Black male students and their experiences with the campus climate and the challenges they have overcome, focusing on the success strategy.

The chapter first identifies the rationale for using qualitative research methods. Next, the role of the researcher in the study is discussed. Following, I present an in-depth explanation of the research design, which includes a description of the setting and participants, data collection, and analysis. Lastly, I discuss the limitations, validity, reliability, and ethical considerations of the study.

The Rationale for Qualitative Research

This study was designed to provide a detailed look into the lives of Black nontraditional male students at a PWI. The study examined and explored their experiences and perceptions of interaction on their campus. Because of the nature of the research questions, qualitative research was most appropriate. Patton (2015) offered a comparison of qualitative and quantitative research as follows, “Qualitative methods facilitate the study of issues in depth and profoundness. Potential fieldwork without being inhibited by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry” (p. 15). Hamilton (2020) believed that qualitative methods are well-suited for investigations seeking to gain an understanding of a group or phenomenon. With qualitative methods, various patterns, themes, and assumptions are identified to construct the meaning of experiences. Patton (2015) further described qualitative design and methods as

“naturalistic, in that the research takes place in the real-world environment, and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (p. 16). The qualitative research methodology is focused on comprehensively investigating to attain detailed and general thoughts and information concerning an individual’s everyday experiences. In the present study, a qualitative approach provides a research design that is descriptive and creates a vivid depiction of the lived experiences of Black male students. This approach considers the voices of the participants, an elaborate description, and interpretation of the problem, and the reflexivity of the researcher (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the use of theoretical traditions of critical and heuristic inquiry explored the lived experiences of successful Black male students. By utilizing the tradition of heuristic inquiry, I was able to incorporate my personal views and my experiences as a reflective tool, which was appropriate as it supported placing meaning and understanding of the participants (Patton, 2015).

Role as the Researcher

As the investigator, I interpreted subjective, open-ended data. Further, I took caution to be sensitive to eliminate researcher bias during data analyses and while conducting semi-structured interviews. The heuristic approach allowed me to be an essential instrument in the study by sharing the very essence of the experience. I acknowledge that my prior experiences and existing relationships I might have with potential participants in the study might have resulted in bias in the subjective analysis of the phenomenon being explored (Locke et al., 2000). As the researcher, I kept a reflective journal to monitor subjectivity and its influence on both the

collection and the analysis of the data stages of the study (Glesne, 2016; Moustakas, 1994).

As the principal instrument in the study, I was able to share the very essence of the experience. The heuristic inquiry does not deal with measurements, appearances, quantity, and behavior. However, it is concerned with the meaning, essence, quality, and experience. By selecting this approach for the study, the expectation is to engage in personal reflections and revelations through the interviews with the participants. The traditions of heuristic inquiry and critical race theory supported the study, as it supports in revealing the voices and lived experiences of the participants. The following section describes the research sites and participants, sampling techniques, procedures for conducting the study, data production and analysis, and limitations of the research study including issues of validity and reliability.

Design of the Study

The purpose of the design of this critical, heuristic study was to express and share the experiences of successful men of color, primarily students of African descent. The research design contains a description of the setting and demographic information; the studies intended data sources and the analysis of the data.

Setting and Participants

Fourteen Black nontraditional male students are in the process of completing an undergraduate degree at a PWI Mid West University (MWU pseudonym), which is an urban Midwestern higher education institution and is home to over 15,000 graduate and undergraduate students. There are 187 full time and part-time faculty with a student to faculty ratio of one faculty member per 12 students. Regarding racial/ethnic diversity at Mid West in 2018, 65% of students identified as White, 13% of students identified as Black/African-American, 7% of students identified as Asian, 7% of students identified as

Non-resident International, 5% of students identified as Hispanic / Latino, and 2% of students identified as two or more ethnicities (MWU website). In quantitative research studies, generally the use of larger sample size is needed; while in contrast, in qualitative research, the sample size is small and can be as small as one participant. The basis behind selecting small sample sizes for qualitative research is that it encourages researchers to have depth or rich, thick description of phenomena over a broad cross-section of participants (Gall et al., 2007). Rich, thick description is a detailed description to allow readers to make decisions and enables them to transfer material to other situations (Creswell, 2009).

Sampling Techniques

Qualitative researchers collect data until no new information can be retrieved or the information from the data obtained becomes redundant (Gall et al., 2007). Patton (2015) suggests that participants with cases of rich information can be derived from purposeful sampling.

Purposeful Sampling

The study employed purposeful sampling as used in most qualitative research, to select participants and site that purposefully inform with thoughtful insights of the research problem and primary phenomenon of the research (Creswell, 2009). More specifically, I employed a collaboration of purposeful sampling strategies that included criterion and snowball sampling methods for this heuristic inquiry.

Criterion Sampling

Criterion sampling refers to choosing all cases that meet some part of the criteria (Patton, 2015). The use of this strategy is to generate a list of possible participants who

identify as Black, males, nontraditional, and are in their third year or nearing completion of an undergraduate degree at a PWI. This approach was vital in capturing the experiences of those Black students who have had some time to navigate the campus and have had opportunities for various interactions with both faculty and staff at the institution.

Snowball Sampling

The snowball sampling technique includes having discussions with individuals who may fit the study and then using these same individuals to help create access, and point to other individuals who will or can potentially be participants (Patton, 2015). The plan created a chain of participants who were information-rich in the study.

Procedures for finding and recruiting participants for this study included the following. First, the use of a purposeful sampling technique to help identify Black male students who fit within the noted characteristics and received contact information from the student life office and multicultural office through an organization with a focus on Black males or initiatives. Second, I created a call to participate in the research study using a flyer to my targeted population. After that I employed the criterion sampling technique to screen potential participants for this study, to help in narrowing down the pool of participants to those who fit the criterion, and if necessary, incorporate snowball sampling to expand the pool of participants up to 14.

Once all participants were selected, I distributed consent forms to sign (see Appendix A). Procedures for this study followed qualitative purposeful sampling techniques as well as confirmation by the Human Subjects Protection of Institutional Review Board's (IRB) regulation for research (see Appendix B). To comply with the University's IRB, I completed and submitted all the necessary forms needed for human subjects research. To advise the

research participants of their role in the study and the overall purpose of the investigation, I used an Informed Consent Form with a cover letter that informed the students that their identity, as well as the identity of the higher education institution, would remain confidential (see Appendix C).

Data Collection

To accurately amass the students' inspirations, thoughts, opinions, and feelings, data collection was performed in two phases. The first phase consisted of one 60-minute in-depth semi-structured interview with each participant. The second phase was to invite participants to engage in a theoretical focus group discussion. I conducted the two phases of data collection within eight weeks.

Participant Interviews

The purpose of interviewing is to allow the researcher to hear first-hand the thoughts the participant has on a particular subject. An interview, according to deMarrais (2004), is the engagement of the researcher and participant in a conversation focused on questions relevant to a research study. Interviews represent one of the most common ways of collecting data in qualitative research because they provide opportunities for the researcher to collect rich and meaning-making data (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). In-depth interviews are used to create "categories from the data and then to analyze relationships between categories" while attending to how the "lived experience" of research participants can be understood (Patton, 2015, p. 433).

Interview questions usually ask participants for their thoughts, opinions, perspectives, or descriptions of specific experiences. Through interviews, a researcher can extract more in-depth information about their informants that they will be most likely unable to learn by

only watching them in their real-life activities (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, this process of gathering information allows the researcher to record and validate while creating authenticity in forming meaning accurately. According to Frels and Onwuegbuzie (2013), qualitative interviews enhance both representation and legitimation of the phenomenon of interest.

Within the interviews, I asked the participants to talk about themselves, guided by a detailed interview protocol (see Appendix D). As needed, I asked the individual to expand or explain their answer further. My goal was to retrieve vivid explanations of their experience, from their point of view. I utilized an audio recorder to ensure their responses are captured accurately; the participants signed a separate consent form to permit this taping (see Appendix E).

Focus Group Interview

After the initial phase of data collection, a focus group will be organized. The focus group session included having at least half of the overall participants from the semi-structured interviews. According to Berg (2004), focus groups are an ideal means of collecting data from individuals. Therefore, participants were invited to participate in an audio-recorded focus group discussion that occurred on a day and time, which best fit the groups' schedule. Using a semi-structured approach question guide allows for more specific questions to prompt discussion in the sense that the researcher is allowed to explore responses further. The flow of the discussion leads the group discussion as a conversational style or approach. The researcher intends to explore students experiences on themes that will be identified from the initial interviews. The interview protocol for the focus group was developed following the completion of initial interviews in collaboration with my doctoral chair. The following section discusses the procedure for analyzing the collected data.

Data Analysis

This study focused on the experiences of nontraditional Black male students at a predominantly white institution with the intent to illuminate the positive aspects of those experiences. Heuristic inquiry consists of six processes for data analysis: initial engagement; immersion; incubation; illumination; explication; and creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). The following section details how I used heuristic inquiry to analyze the data.

Heuristic Inquiry

In the effort to capture the essence of nontraditional Black male students and give voice to the stories, a heuristic inquiry was the primary analytical approach in this study. Clark Moustakas developed this process of inquiry in 1990. It is a form of phenomenological inquiry that begins with a question or problem that has been a personal challenge to the researcher in the effort to understand him or herself and the world (Patton, 2015). According to deMarrais (2004), phenomenological researchers produce situations, whereas the participants reflect on the experience that they have lived. The investigator seeks to illuminate or answer these questions. Unlike other phenomenological studies in which the researcher need not have had the experience, in heuristic research, the investigator must have had an explicit, intimate encounter with the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1994). There must have been real-life connections. The heuristic researcher must have undergone the experience in a vital, intense, if not the experience as such, then a comparable or equivalent experience (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, the heuristic inquiry is described as a process, a way of being informed, and a way of knowing. The process of inquiry highlights the personal experience and insights of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015).

Initial Engagement

Heuristic research involves several concepts and processes. According to Moustaskas (1994), within the first process *initial engagement*, the researcher initiates the process of heuristic inquiry. This step encourages the exploration of the topic as part of the discovery process. Once the researcher has identified the focus of an investigation, the fundamental beginning process is self-dialogue. The researcher's awareness, self-discoveries, and understanding are the initial steps of the process.

Immersion

Within *immersion*, the researcher must begin with their self, to discover the elements and qualities that make up an experience. The concept of tacit knowledge, which is at the base of all heuristic discovery, is next. Tacit knowing is the ability to sense the wholeness of something from an understanding of its qualities or parts. Following the concept of tacit knowing in heuristic research is intuition. In intuition, an individual makes inferences and arrives at a knowledge of understanding structures or dynamics. Intuition is the bridge that is formed between the implicit knowledge of tacit knowing and explicit knowledge, which can be observed and described. These processes allowed my experiences, thoughts, and past feelings to surface. After the *initial engagement* and *immersion* stages, *incubation* follows.

Incubation

Incubation is the third stage of heuristic data analysis. Incubation refers to the process of turning inward to seek a broader and more extensive comprehension of nature, meaning, quality, or theme of human experience. This phase is where the researcher separates self from the data to accomplish a more profound sense of understanding by engaging in other

activities. This process may seem strange, but Moustakas states that being involved with something else often brings the data into awareness (1990).

Illumination

Illumination follows incubation in heuristic research. Through illumination, the researcher can determine core ideas that make up an experience, identify and assess connecting feelings or thoughts, and achieve cognitive knowledge. Moustakas (1990) suggested within the illumination stage, there is “breakthrough into conscious awareness of the qualities and qualities of qualities into themes inherent in the question” (p. 29). The grouping of themes is the result of data coding, which takes place at this stage. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018) stated that “codes are labels that assign symbolic meaning to the detailed or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 71). I transcribed each interview, allowing myself to be immersed in the process, becoming more connected with the participants. I listened to the audio recording repeatedly to verify and make corrections as needed. After all the interviews, a file was created to store all the information.

Explication and Creative Synthesis

Explication allows the researcher to identify the qualities of an experience that have remained out of conscious reach mainly because the researcher has not paused long enough to examine his or her experience of the phenomenon. *Creative synthesis* calls for the communication of the findings in a creative and meaningful way. Rather than provide a summary, this step integrates and expands upon personal experience and knowledge that illustrates the essence of the subject or question of inquiry (Moustakas, 1994). Lastly, heuristic processes relate to the internal frame of reference.

Validation

Only the experiencing persons can depict the experience by examining it through perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and sense. Therefore, the ability to know and understand the meanings, nature, and essence of any human experience depends on the inner frame of reference of the individual who will have, is having, or has had the experience. The heuristic process is autobiographic, but there is also a social significance with practically every question that matters personally (Moustakas, 1994). As the participants in the study reflect on their experiences, and as I reflect on mine, a connection developed between the participants and myself as we created the meaning of our experiences. Heuristics underscores connectedness and relationship (Patton, 2015).

Coding

In continuing the analysis process, a generated a list of possible codes was available for the revision of the transcribed documents. The next phase of analyzing the data was the use of enumerative and thematic coding (Grbich, 2007; Miles et al., 2018) by reading the transcribed information to determine themes. Once there were identified themes, the next step was to check for commonalities across the participants that would be the basis for the focus group. After completing the discussion group, these identified themes allowed an even more profound conversation as the participants reflected more on their experiences. After completing the focus group, the information revealed an extravagant in-depth look at the essence of the phenomenon. Analyzing the data was essential in answering the research questions. I used the stories of the participants to reconstruct their individual stories with a goal of creative synthesis and creating a larger story that summed up all the stories. The following are the potential limitations of the study.

Limitations

Research in itself may have issues that may restrict the research process and eventually alter the finding of the study. The investigator in qualitative research is the instrument of data collection and the analysis process, but it is the responsibility of the researcher to decide on allowed limitations and to address them within the study. deMarrais (2004) described qualitative interviews by saying they “rely on developing a rapport with participants while discussing in detail the aspects of the particular phenomenon which is studied” (p. 53). The relationship of participant/researcher will accomplish rapport in several ways, however; deMarrais (2004) suggested that one strategy to build rapport with the individuals you are interviewing is to have follow-up interviews throughout the research process, which can be a form of member checking to ensure validity. This ongoing relationship can lead to a higher level of trust between the researcher and participant, which could ultimately lead to more in-depth information collected throughout the research interviews (which in this study was unfortunately relegated to only two possible meetings). Researcher bias, reactivity, and reflexivity were the primary areas of concerns for this study. Thus, all biases and weaknesses were monitored closely and continuously in efforts to delimit the limitations of this study.

Researcher Bias

Maxwell (2013) suggested that qualitative researchers need to be aware of their researcher bias. Researcher bias relates to the prejudice of the researcher or bias either where the selection of the data matches his assumptions and existing theories or where the collection of the data “stands out.” Consequently, qualitative research includes the researcher’s assumptions, existing theories, personal experiences, beliefs, and worldviews; it

is virtually impossible to remove all forms of subjectivity on the part of the researcher. However, it is essential for the researcher to be aware of how his subjectivity can influence the development and conclusions of the study. To avoid such possible researcher bias, Maxwell suggested the researcher acknowledge possible biases that could develop as well as explain how he will confront them in the research proposal (Maxwell, 2013).

Regarding potential researcher bias for this study, I am a member of the group under study (i.e., Black male students). As such, there was a need to ensure that I revealed no kind of demonstration, any form of agreement towards any responses as they pertained to the participant's experience, issues, and challenges. Also, there was a need to prevent any partialities or subjectivity as a researcher since this study would be administered at the same institution where I work; therefore, participant selection needed to be individuals whom I had never met before conducting the research study.

Reactivity and Reflexivity

Maxwell (2013) suggested that researchers stay cautious of potential reactivity and reflexivity that may emerge during the research process. The influence of the setting and/or participants are referred to as reactivity. Maxwell (2013) further stated that, while conducting qualitative research, the aim is not to keep the control of the researcher out of the process. Maxwell (2013) recommended that qualitative researchers understand the influence they hold over the setting and participants and how to productively utilize it. More specifically, the researcher must understand how his influence could affect the validity of conclusions drawn from data from the study (Maxwell, 2013). I made every effort to recognize throughout the research process how my influence, privilege, and potential power over the research setting, and participants could affect this study. At the same time, I was a participant participating in

the research process, by engaging in the follow-up interview and in checking transcripts to ensure that my influence did not overpower participants' accurate responses regarding their descriptions of collegiate experiences.

Reflexivity denotes to how the researcher, “acknowledges the impact of the writing on the researcher, on the participants, and on the reader” (Creswell, 2013, p. 179). Maxwell (2013) defined reflexivity as “the fact that the researcher is part of the social world he or she studies” (p. 82). Maxwell (2013) further explained how, with qualitative interviews, the interviewer may influence the interview responses. Maxwell (2013) offered that to eliminate the interviewers' influence over the interview, the interview questions should not be leading. As such, I reviewed all interview questions for this study carefully to ensure that none of the questions were leading.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are two factors that a qualitative researcher must be concerned about while designing a study, analyzing results, and judging the study quality (Patton, 2015). Additionally, because the real world is subject to change, a qualitative researcher should be present throughout the changes to document an event before and after the change occurs (Patton, 2015). Within qualitative research, credibility is associated with the researcher as the instrument (Patton, 2015). Therefore as the primary instrument of this study, I used careful consideration within the process of data collection and the use of “rich, thick description,” “member checking,” and “crystallization.”

Rich, Thick Description of Data

A strategy this study adopted was the use of rich, thick, or detailed description of the data, to provide a vivid picture of the phenomenon of nontraditional Black male student

experiences at a predominantly white institution of higher education. A rich, thick description of the environment and participants for this study facilitated possible transferability of data and conclusions to other contexts or participants that share similar characteristics (Maxwell, 2013). Regarding the rich, thick description of this study, I provided a detailed description of the participants and setting, which will allow readers to transfer information to other situations or surroundings (Creswell, 2009).

Member Checking

Member checking is primarily used in qualitative inquiry methodology and is defined as a quality control process by which the researcher seeks to improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of the information recorded during a research interview (Creswell, 2013). Gall and Gall (1996) defined member checking as “the process of having these individuals review statements made in the researcher’s report for accuracy and completeness” (p. 575). Whether the member checking occurs during the interview or near the end of the project, these member checks are necessary. The goal is to decrease the incidence of incorrect data or the incorrect interpretation of data to provide authentic findings (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Merriam (2009) provided recommendations of strategies that promote trustworthiness as it pertains to internal and external validity. I used member checks (Merriam, 2009) as a way of engaging my research participants in reviewing, checking, and providing feedback on the transcription of their interview, as well as the interpretive narratives that emerged from the inductive analysis. Once the transcripts were completed, each participant received a copy of their verbatim transcript to check for accuracy; they had an opportunity to respond to any discrepancies, and to make sure their thoughts were captured correctly. This process was crucial, as it assisted the researcher in

identifying any areas that needed revision. The use of member checking also contributed to the richness of the data collected during the study. Additionally, this process enhanced the credibility of the study.

Crystallization

To integrate the phenomenon, I used the process of crystallization. Crystallization “builds upon a rich tradition of diverse practices in ethnography and qualitative representation” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 3). Including crystallization in this study provided for a “deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, and understanding of the topic” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 3). Using crystallization as a guide, I included multiple points of both data collection and analysis through which this study explored the experience of nontraditional Black male students. Crystallization requires making sense of data through multiple ways of knowing, which required critical self-reflection and awareness of my role as the researcher. Including accounts of my interactions with the participants allows readers to understand the essence of our relationship and my intentionality of representing the findings from the students’ experiences.

University Ethical Review Protocol

The Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978) states that all research involving human subjects follow three ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Olson & Jobe, 1996). Respect for persons incorporates two considerations: respect for autonomy; and protection of impaired or diminished autonomy, while beneficence refers to the ethical obligation to maximize benefits and to minimize harms and wrongs. Justice relates to the

ethical obligation to treat each person following what is morally right and proper, to give each what is due to him or her (Olson & Jobe, 1996).

Olson and Jobe (1996) stated, “In most cases of studies involving human subjects, respect for persons demands that subjects enter into the study voluntarily and with sufficient information” (p. 257). Thus, I did not deceive the participants about the purpose, procedures, goals, risks, and anticipated benefits of this present study. I let them know upfront as truthfully as possible what my intentions were for conducting this qualitative study. Each participant signed a consent form reflecting that their participation was voluntary and free of coercion and undue influence; withdrawal could occur at any time. According to Creswell (2013), researchers must anticipate ethical issues that may arise in writing research questions, gathering and analyzing data, and disseminating the findings. Concerning the relationship with research participants, I was able to develop a relationship wherein I provided respect to all participants’ perspectives, experiences, and feelings while remaining very careful not to violate their human rights or privacy. It was my responsibility and obligation as the researcher to protect the study participants by maintaining their anonymity.

I submitted for approval a protocol to the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to conduct the study. The University Adult Health Sciences and Social Sciences Institutional Review Boards, FWA #00005427, organize and operate in compliance with all U.S. regulatory requirements related to the protection of human research participants. Specifically, the UMKC IRBs comply with 45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 50, 21 CFR 56, 21 CFR 312, 21 CFR 812, and 45 CFR 164.508-514. In addition, the IRBs operate in compliance with portions of the Health Insurance of Portability Act of 1996 (HIPAA Privacy Rule) that apply to research, as described in 45 CFR Parts 160 and 164 as appropriate as well as with the

Guidelines of the International Conference on Harmonization (ICH) to the extent required by the FDA. All data collected through interviews, surveys, and focus groups maintain confidentiality. The collection of the data from the interviews and the focus group will be stored on a password-protected computer. The safety, confidentiality, anonymity, and ethical considerations for my participants is important to me. I will not violate their trust. There are limited studies that focus on Black male academic success; most of the current research focuses on the shortcoming of Black male student's persistence in higher education.

Conclusion

Focus on the successes of nontraditional Black male students is limited in research. Most studies on Black males in higher education is geared towards the disparities as compared to other ethnic groups. The lack of research on successful Black male students despite their apparent negative societal images and being a part of the subgroup as nontraditional provides a gap in the literature, and if it not addressed, the gap will only continue to widen. This study is designed to aid in narrowing the gap and equipping higher education administrators with insights to better serve this population. The goal is to illuminate concepts and ideas, identified from the interactions with the participants of the study of Black male students at a Midwestern PWI. In summary, Chapter 3 consisted of the research design, rationale for the use of qualitative inquiry, ethical considerations, reliability, and validity. A significant part of the chapter was also information related to the data collection and analysis. The following chapter discusses the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The present study examined the phenomenon of “Black Success” as experienced by nontraditional Black male students; inviting them to share their experiences of what they suggest contributed to their success as students, as well as to appreciate their experiences in higher education and, more specifically at predominantly white institutions (PWI) through a critical heuristic lens. This study’s practical goal was to provide more information about nontraditional Black male students’ experiences while aiding universities and colleges to support growth, development, and overall academic success for this population. This chapter presents the findings from interviews with nontraditional Black male college students in at least their third year of studies at a PWI. The resulting descriptions present the students’ college experiences through their collective voices. The study results identify recurring themes related to participants’ college experiences and their perception of what contributed to their college success.

This qualitative study utilized heuristic inquiry and critical race theory’s traditions to explore nontraditional Black males’ experiences who attend a PWI. The research questions investigated by the study are: (1) How do nontraditional black male students define success? (2) What are the college experiences of successful nontraditional Black male students at Mid Western University? and (3) To what internal and external factors do nontraditional Black male students attribute their college success?

In my experience as a Black male working at a higher education institution, Black Success is rarely displayed; the deficit view is always at the forefront of the conversation. Therefore, this study’s topic was a passion stemming from my experiences and the lack of

research on Black Success and excellence. I wanted to provide new accounts of those successes to change Black males' narratives, especially those who are nontraditional. Participants described the following as contributing to their success as Black male nontraditional college students: their values and beliefs and their spheres of support; each will be detailed later in the chapter. First, in the next section, I review the methodology and participants and define the themes.

As described in Chapter 3, I used interviews to gather the data and enlighten myself about many of the issues facing nontraditional Black male students. Through the varied sampling methods discussed in Chapter 3, I identified 14 student participants who offered insight on their experiences with Success at a PWI. The study participants were Black male students in at least their third year who identified as nontraditional participants enrolled at a PWI. I spent approximately two hours with each participant, in person or via Zoom, collecting the study data. All participants were a part of the semi-structured interview process, and seven participated in a follow-up interview. A purposeful criterion sampling approach was employed. This sampling strategy enabled the participants to be verified through a saturation process that was sensitive to the basis of the success phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015). Criterion sampling assisted in ensuring that the participants were ideal for the study. To deepen the experience, "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (Patton, 2015, p. 230). The criteria that were utilized for participants included (1) being a Black male, (2) had at least one characteristic of being a nontraditional student, and (3) were at least a third-year college student at a PWI. The data gathered provided a sense of their perceptions of their experiences and success. As the primary investigator, I asked the questions, analyzed the data, and was

amazed by the variety of responses. There were many points during the data collection and analysis phases when individual responses made connections to my own experience as a successful nontraditional Black male student, prompting more avenues for future research; however, the purpose of the research study remained the same: to focus on their successes rather than the challenges or obstacles. As the researcher, I required reflexivity to remain mindful of my positionality in the study and understand how personal voice and aspects of the phenomenon being study were conveyed so that the participant experiences did not become intertwined with mine. There were moments when I had certain feelings and biases about the participants, which I attributed to my world experience versus their exposure. Maintaining my voice and position in the study was helped by journaling for my thoughts, salient moments, and a record of my feelings at particular points during the research study. My thoughts and reflections about this expression are offered in Appendix F.

Study Participants

The participants in the study represent nontraditional Black male students at a public higher education institution in a Midwestern state. These Black male students were experiencing the phenomenon that I wanted to explore: they were attending a PWI (Mid Western University); they have at least one characteristic of non-traditionalism and are at least in the third year at the institution. I offer profiles of the participants below.

- 2727 is an international student from Ontario, Canada, and identifies as Guyanese. He studies business management and is in his senior year of college. He is involved in athletics. He is a first-generation college student and works fulltime.

- Ali is an immigrant student from Kansas City, Missouri, and identifies as Kenyan. He studies communication and is in his third year in college. He is very involved in campus activities and is the first in his family to graduate from high school. He is a first-generation college student over the age of 24, who is multilingual and speaking three languages fluently.
- Axel Foley is a domestic student from Kansas City, Missouri. He studies communication and is in his final year of college. He is a first-generation college student who is financially independent and works fulltime. He is involved in campus activities, a Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Incorporated member, and has eight siblings.
- Blue Waters is an international student from the island of Nassau, Bahamas. He studies accounting and is in his final year of college. He delayed his college admission and is involved in campus activities. He is a first-generation college student; he reentered a college and works fulltime. He strives to be better, make a change, and continuously grow; therefore, he is looking forward to graduate school.
- Bob Patrick is an international student from Kingston, Jamaica. He studies mechanical engineering and is in his sixth year of college. He has minimal campus involvement. He is a first-generation college student, financially independent, and works fulltime. He has been in school for the past six years since he was initially interested in chemical engineering. He grew up in a family

yard² of about 25 individuals; therefore, he has a keen sense of different personalities.

- Charles St. John is a domestic student from St. Louis, Missouri. He studies business administration with an emphasis in entrepreneurship and is in his senior year in college. He is a first-generation college student and works fulltime. He is highly involved in campus activities and has a passion for giving back.
- Hubert Perry is an international student from Freeport, Bahamas. He studies engineering and is in his senior year of college. He delayed his college admission and is involved in campus activities. In order to attend college he worked at a shipyard to secure enough finances for admission. He is over the age of 24, a problem solver, and is always looking for another option, exhausting all resources.
- Island Man is an international student from Jamaica. He studies environmental science and is in his final year of college. He is a first-generation college student and works fulltime. He is involved in campus activity and is thankful to a local business in his country for the opportunity to attend Mid Western University through a scholarship.
- John is a domestic student from O'Fallon, Missouri. He studies pharmacy and is in his third year in college. He is over the age of 24 and works fulltime, while he is involved in campus activities. His mother has a Doctorate in Education, and his

² An area where extended family members live in small houses.

father has an associate degree; they are both entrepreneurs. He has always felt the need to be a role model and a caregiver, and he goes out of his way to help others.

- Josh is a domestic student from St. Louis, Missouri. He studies medicine and is in his third year in college. He is a first-generation college student and is financially independent. He is involved in campus activities and has embarked on a journey that nobody in his family or anybody he has personally known has made—medical school.
- Michael is an international student from Lagos, Nigeria. He studies mechanical engineering and is in his third year of college. He is financially independent and works fulltime, while being heavily involved on campus ever since his first year. He graduated high school at 15; one month later, he started at Mid Western University at 16.
- Michael Williams is a domestic student from St. Louis, Missouri. He studies electrical engineering and is in his third year of college. He is a first-generation college student who is over the age of 24 and works fulltime. He is heavily involved in campus activities and enjoys learning to inspire his younger relatives.
- Omar Williams is an international student from Portmore, Jamaica. He studies business management and is in his third year of college. He is not involved much in campus activity other than campus employment. This first-generation college student has reentered a college program and is financially independent.
- Sunny is a domestic student from Jefferson City, Missouri. He is studying computer science and is in his fifth year of college. He is a first-generation

college student who is over the age of 24, is financially independent, and works fulltime. He is highly involved in campus activities. He is a transfer student from a Historically Black College (HBCU) and is proud of his blackness and has changed his major numerous times.

All participants met National Center for Education Statistics criteria for nontraditional students by exhibiting at least two of the required characteristics (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). More than half of the study participants held more than four of these NCES characteristics (see Table 1). Table 2 reflects the cumulative nontraditional characteristics of the study participants as a group.

Table 1

Description of Study Participants

Pseudonym	Year in School	Major	Nontraditional Characteristics
Blue Waters	Senior	Accounting	6
Sunny	Fifth Year Senior	Computer Science	6
Bob Patrick	Senior	Mechanical Engineering	5
Axel Foley	Senior	Communications	4
Hubert Perry	Senior	Engineering	4
Island Man	Senior	Environmental Science	4
Omar Williams	Junior	Business Management	4
Michael Williams	Junior	Engineering	3
2727	Senior	Business Management	2
Ali	Junior	Communications	2
Charles St. John	Senior	Business Administration	2
John	Junior	Pharmacy	2
Josh	Third Year	Medicine	2
Michael	Junior	Mechanical Engineering	2

Table 2

Non-Traditional Characteristics of Study Participants

Characteristics*	Number of Participants w/ Characteristics
First Generation Student	11
Works Full Time	10
Financially Independent	10
Age over 24	9
Reentered a College Program	5
Delayed College Attendance after High School	3
Single Parent	0
College Part-Time	0
Has Dependents other than Spouse	0
No Standard High School Diploma	0
Veteran Status	0

*List from National Center of Education Statistics, 2012

Themes

After the data were analyzed, two main themes emerged from the participants' data. This section provides definitions for the themes that came together, helping to condense these remarkable nontraditional Black male students' stories. After considering these Black men's different experiences, I spent months reviewing interview transcripts in the explication stage, where pieces of the puzzle began surfacing from the data. Because of this aspect, establishing codes at the descriptive and interpretive level was a relevant component to find the emergent themes and patterns of the phenomenon that would be considered vital to the aims of the qualitative research being conducted. I developed a codebook to help organize and sort data in preparation for analysis. The codes were synthesized and created two central themes to the study: (1) Values and Belief (2) Support and Belonging. I conducted a frequency count for the data sources to discover the emergent themes and dominant code patterns.

The Value and Belief of Life

Value and Belief dealt with these nontraditional Black male students' attitudes, mindsets, and perspectives in this academic setting. I heard how the students viewed themselves, interacted with their family members, and engaged with society at large. The attitude of persistence, self-reliance, and self-determination are influences that had value on their higher education choices and experiences, especially those that influenced their academic success. Values that participants shared included their determination to succeed despite challenges that presented themselves. Hardships included academic failure and temporary withdrawal from school, personal illness, illness of family members, financial troubles, racism, and an insufficient number of Black male role models. In response to these issues, participants often felt the need to be independent and self-reliant in order to not appear stereotypically in need of assistance or deficient.

Support and Belonging

Support and belonging dealt with interactions on campus with faculty, staff, and peers. The act of feeling accepted, having individuals challenging growth supported by motivation arise from reviewing the data. In his book, *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students*, Strayhorn (2018) presented a conceptual framework to make sense of sense of belonging on college and university campuses. Strayhorn maintains that a sense of belonging is "a basic human need" (p. 18) that is essential to address before higher education leaders and educators can address other goals (e.g., learning), and students must feel like they matter in order to feel a sense of belonging in a campus environment. Positive outcomes related to a sense of belonging include retention, well-being, and academic achievement. Strayhorn stressed the opportunity to use the

framework to enhance support and policies that could increase students' sense of belonging and, ultimately, their academic and social success. In the study, the students I interviewed exemplified this by explicitly expressing appreciation for the time and attention paid to them. The demeanor of all participants was overall extremely favorable as they responded to the interview questions and provided examples of their acceptance and comfort as students at the college. They responded in an upbeat manner, coupled with complimentary comments around the overall support they received.

Findings

In the following section, I present the findings organized by research question. First, I address research question 1: How do nontraditional Black male students define success?

Success In Other Words

Success should mean different things to different people, and this is the case for the men in my study. The participants described success as attaining goals and accomplishing something, and while no one definition of success encompasses all participants, each includes a sense of fulfillment. As an educator and parent of young children, I have found that grade point average (GPA) and grades are generally the response when engaging in the conversation of success in the educational setting. Participants in the present study had a more holistic view of their definition of success. For the 14 nontraditional Black males of this study, GPA and grades were far from the discussion. Identifying success was defined through alternative measures such as navigating college and a sense of community and pride through social integration. It seems as though to define success, participants understood their intrinsic motivation to define this term. Participants also indicated that personal development was an essential measure of success. The meaning of success at college and life is a complex process

that often involves a balance; success is a sense of accomplishment. This sentiment was succinctly captured by Michael's statement when he noted, "I think college is all about finding who you are as a person." Specifically, participants' responses revealed the importance of becoming socially integrated and developing a sense of self-sufficiency and freedom and personal accomplishment.

Socially Integrated

Participants spoke about how their success is incorporated into the community, building a solid foundation for all within. Success is making "everyone that has worked so hard for my life happy and proud and never able for one second to regret those inputs in my life," influencing "people's lives positively, whether by giving them knowledge in my field or giving them advice" (Michael); impacting "others around you, helping your community, and reaching personal goals or community goals" (Hubert Perry). Sunny clarified the point about social integration, adding that it is "not as getting a good job done or making much money, but building a community; what you bring back should be what success is, what you can bring back to your community." It is "getting the task done while helping others in the process" (Josh). In each way, the men felt that success was not an individual endeavor—to be successful for themselves, the community had to be successful too.

Self-sufficiency and Freedom

The participants viewed success as less dependent on others and ultimately having a form or sense of financial stability and freedom. "Being able to be financially stable and being able to be, you know, have a positive mind. I feel if you have a positive mind, you are more than likely to be successful" (Blue Waters). "Setting individual goals and executing them in the best way possible. Whether or not you have achieved those goals, if the effort

was honest, and you did everything in your power to attain those goals, you are successful” (Bob Patrick). Similarly, Michael Williams and Charles St. John remarked: “when you complete a goal that you created” and “doing what makes you happy and what makes you content with your life that success.” Lastly, the sentiment of accomplishing one goal, regardless of what this is personally or academically, as described by participants “achieving the goal you set for yourself” (Omar Williams). Although students did not discount the importance of good grades or degree attainment, their narratives indicated that grades were not the only meaningful aspect of college success; independent thinking and financial independence were key aspects of success for them. Table 3 summarizes their individual definitions of success.

Table 3*Participants' Definitions of Success*

Pseudonym	Definition of Success
Michael	Success is making everyone that has worked so hard for my life happy and proud and never able for one second to regret those inputs in my life.
Blue Waters	Success influences people's lives positively, whether by giving them knowledge in my field or giving them advice.
Ali	Success for me is not a result. I will say success is continuous learning. Being able to be financially stable and being able to be, you know, have a positive mind. I feel if you have a positive mind, you are more than likely to be successful.
Island Man	Success to me is you see your ups and downs; you go through the motions, you go through the roller coaster. Eventually, you find that light bulb or your light, your, your, your successful.
Axel Foley	Success to me, accomplishing one goal Success is just going after something worthy. It is continuously achieving and persisting.
Hubert Perry	I define success by reaching a personal goal. Success is about impacting others around you, helping your community, and reaching personal goals or community goals. That is what I feel that success is.
Bob Patrick	I define success as just setting individual goals and executing them in the best way possible. Whether or not you have achieved those goals, if the effort was honest, and you did everything in your power to attain those goals, you are successful.
Michael Williams	Success is when you complete a goal that you created.
Josh	I would define success as basically giving your all to complete tasks. Success is getting the task done while helping others in the process.
Charles St. John	I define success by doing what makes you happy and what makes you content with your life that success.
Sunny	We have to define success, not as getting a good job done or making much money, but building a community; what you bring back should be what success is, what you can bring back to your community.
John	I define success as pretty much accomplishing your goals and whatever you set for yourself.
2727	Success is making the people that love you proud.
Omar Williams	Success is achieving the goal that you set for yourself.

Attributing Success

Attribution (Weiner, 1986) describes the explanations people give for their success or failure in three areas: locus, stability, and control dimensions. These explanations depend on whether people perceive their successes or failures as internal or external, stable or unstable, controllable or uncontrollable (Weiner, 1992). In the present study, the exploration of experiences of the participants explains various modalities for their experiences and where they place the attributing factors to their experience. In the following section I describe the findings for research questions two and three:

- What are the college experiences of successful nontraditional Black male students' at Mid Western University?
- To what internal and external factors do nontraditional Black male students attribute their college success?

The Values and Belief of Life

Values and Beliefs is a theme that surfaced through the intrinsic motivation and external motivators that influenced nontraditional Black male students' success. A sense of belief that education can be an equalizer fits in this category; the participants shared examples of what encouraged them to pursue success for degree attainment, including their enrollment motivations, academic success strategies, organizational support, and family influence. All 14 participants shared examples of how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation inspired their persistence in their college achievement. They demonstrated an ability to navigate challenges such as time management and balance, paying for college, and lack of inclusion to ensure that they achieved academic success in their coursework by exploring

strategies highlighting through intrinsic and external motivators. For example, all participants shared at least one or more personal or professional obligations that involved their time and effort:

I'm currently involved in men of color, Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. I'm the former president of the National Society of Black Engineers. I'm also, I also have other positions throughout my college career in different orgs, mainly NASBE, and Alpha and I work as well. (Sunny)

So, as a sophomore, I'm involved in just general or it's like pre-pharmacy society. And then I'm on the board of Men of Color. I serve as the treasurer. And then for NAACP, I serve as the finance chair. And for those who don't know, NAACP is a National Association of Colored People and then also served as the Secretary for the Delta Rho chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity Incorporated. (John)

Well, multiple on campus org, such as NASBE, the National Society for Black Engineers, Men of Color, and the NAACP. (Michael Williams)

I am currently diversity Ambassador on campus and help with facilitating different conversations about different things diversity or inclusion. I've previously been on the boards of organizations around the campus as well as at the Medical School. I'm currently on a couple different boards, open positions. Yeah, so medical school, one of the boards I'm on right now. It's called the AAMC OSR. So it's American Academy of Medical Colleges. And we kind of serve as a liaison for the school, talking to the higher ups that kind of control things with medical schools. And I was also on the Council of Curriculum. So kind of just analyzing the curriculum and seeing whether there's any changes or anything like that. (Josh)

The students in the study shared insightful information about outside responsibilities, the impact these responsibilities had on academic success, and the ability to navigate obligational challenges while pursuing their degrees. For example, four participants (Charles St. John, Bob Patrick, Axel Foley, and Blue Waters) provided instances of how they balanced or adjusted their lives to stay focused on their college achievement, which they expressed has helped them persist.

Well, my involvement with my fraternity, and just I couldn't quit. And I had, I mean, I don't know if it matters that I transferred...I transferred and I was like, you know, I'm just gonna, finish out here. I did like the program. And it was just close to home, I guess. Not necessarily close to home, I just like Kansas City, and I love the city. So it's right here. (Axel Foley)

The following two sections highlight findings related to intrinsic motivation and external motivators; examples summarized in Figure 1.

Intrinsic Motivation

Within the overarching theme of value & belief, intrinsic motivation appeared to be the most influential factor fueling continuous enrollment in the students' degree efforts in the study. All of the participants shared how intrinsic support measures helped define their primary motivation for achieving their goals. Intrinsic motivation pertains to activities done "for their own sake," or for their inherent interest and enjoyment or that of internal self-determination and drive to continue toward one's goals (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Internal reasons for persisting in college included being inspired to not be in the same unpromotable position as coworkers, a personal drive to succeed, family, and seeking skill development to fuel one's quest for learning. When participants described why they had endured college through complex challenges, they consistently noted that quitting was not an option in their minds.

In the interview, Bob Patrick shared,

I think that, if I can use the word desperation, it is my only course of action to get where I want to be. So there is no option for me to waver or get off this path in any way. Because I refuse to quit. I'm set up with a competitive nature. Okay.. my determination to finish, because if I don't finish, it doesn't look good. Um, I would say, you know, just a passion for learning, of course, to make money when I graduate.

In describing his refusal to quit and his competitive nature, Bob Patrick shares his values and beliefs in ensuring that he will finish not only because he wants to but because "it doesn't

Figure 1.

The Values and Beliefs of Life

Intrinsic Motivation	<p>“I think that, if I can use the word desperation, it is my only course of action to get where I want to be. So there is no option for me to waver or get off this path in any way. Because I refuse to quit.” (Bob Patrick)</p> <p>“It was a personal drive, my drive to finish what I started it. Like everything I’ve done, I feel like if I started, I could complete it. There is no need for me to have an incomplete when I came here I was two years away. Now I am a semester away. I feel that is my drive. I want to accomplish this that not only for me but for the family and the ones who are under me so that they can know. Hey, someone did it, I can do it.” (Blue Waters)</p> <p>“I realize that I have to be my own support sometimes and be my own motivation after my parents went through a divorce. A stable mind is important. You have to know what you want out of education.” (Charles St. John)</p>
External Support	<p>“Oh, it’s been amazing. I was able to connect by meeting and like talking to different faculty, was able to connect, get engaged with more faculty so they could help my student success.” He continues to share, “Yeah, so I have used SI (Supplemental Instruction) for years, which I like, supplemental learning sessions...sessions that the TA’s put on that are outside of the class for help students who like just need extra help. I definitely feel like that’s an outstanding service. Because not everybody learns at the same pace, I’m definitely one of these people. The Multicultural Student office I did not use as much as other students have, but I definitely do appreciate it just being there.” (Sunny)</p> <p>“I would say student-wise, my class motivated me to push myself. I push myself because, uh, they do good, and I kind of do not want to be on the side that does not do well. So, I kind of try to work hard as I can. As far as my teachers, they kind of push me by challenging me with some of the stuff that we do, and that just kind of keeps me on my toes.” (Michael Williams)</p> <p>“Uh um . . . mostly parents and family. They are most, like, my biggest motivation. That’s why I stay focused and do well, and you know, I just pretty much do my best in every class. And, that’s my biggest push.” (Hurbert Perry)</p>

look good” – he has a sense that he must finish to represent something to himself and others.

With Blue Waters the values were similar; he said:

It was a personal drive, my drive to finish what I started it. Like everything I’ve done, I feel like if I started, I could complete it. There is no need for me to have an incomplete when I came here I was two years away [from graduation]. Now I am a

semester away. I feel that is my drive. I want to accomplish this that not only for me but for the family and the ones who are under me so that they can know. Hey, someone did it, I can do it.

In each of the cases above, the students relied heavily on a belief that they themselves could accomplish their goal: completing their classes successfully, make progress toward graduation. They did not believe quitting was an option.

Contrary to Bob Patrick and Blue Waters, Michael Williams' most influential factor promoting his continuous degree work was himself. He embraced a realization that his success ultimately resided with his willingness to put in the effort and work to achieve his educational goals. "I love the school, honestly. I mean, engineering has ups and downs throughout the years. But it's above. I just like, can't let it go. And I'm the type of person once I start something. I got to see through" (Michael Williams). Likewise, Charles St. John stressed self-reliance as a motivating factor: "I realize that I have to be my own support sometimes and be my own motivation after my parents went through a divorce. A stable mind is important. You have to know what you want out of education." After his parents' divorce, Charles gained a sense of reliance on himself, and his beliefs shifted to find his motivation within. Similarly, Josh reflected a student with family support, but he unexpectedly experienced a change in his family structure. Through the change in his family dynamics, he recognized that there would be times when he had to depend on himself solely to keep making progress toward his educational goals. Meanwhile, Sunny described an individual determination as to the following:

It's really a personal thing. My drive; my purpose. Knowing that, you know, there is something on the inside of me, even though, I really don't know what it is yet. There is something in there and it's just my duty and my obligation to figure out. You know, what that is, and I just decided to do that through education. You know, and it's really those, who I was talking about earlier...those stories, meeting people, those, you

know, activities or clubs, you know, all it takes is, you know, that one conversation or that one piece of information that can, that will cause you to have that aha moment. And, then it's like a domino effect. It leads to other things but of uh um, yes.

In fact, in a way, all participants described the most significant reason they continued enrollment was self-motivation, which is gained through the excitement of earning a college degree. Each participant had personal reasons to explain why this was an essential goal for them. Each of the participants had different reasons for their self-motivation. However, comments that surfaced throughout the interviews indicated it was up to them to motivate themselves and their responsibility to show up to class. These participants echoed that it was not someone else's obligation to keep them motivated.

According to the participants, the decision to attend college and persist, remain focused on goal attainment, and work diligently towards success was influenced by the degree of individual motivation. This conclusion was instrumental in avoiding distractions prevalent in college. For example, self-determination and motivation enabled five participants to return to college after initially dropping out due to financial difficulties. Due to self-motivation, each participants remained focused on their educational goals when their peers were engaged in social activities that may distract students from focusing on academics. According to the nontraditional Black males who participated in this study, self-motivation was internal and vital for college persistence. Despite college life experiences, self-motivation influenced each individual's response to the experience's overall successful outcome, no matter what challenges they faced.

External Motivator

Recognition, family support, and interactions with others are examples of external motivators which surfaced within the category of Values and Belief and proved influential in

the students' ability to persist toward degree completion. Organizational support linked to faculty and staff emerged as a specific external support measure. Faculty and staff's support reflected acts of encouragement, recognition, motivation, and challenges to growth.

Organizational support and involvement helped make a difference for many of the men as they worked to achieve degree completion. For example, Michael Williams stated:

I would say student-wise, my class motivated me to push myself. I push myself because, uh, they do good, and I kind of do not want to be on the side that does not do well. So, I kind of try to work hard as I can. As far as my teachers, they kind of push me by challenging me with some of the stuff that we do, and that just kind of keeps me on my toes.

Peers and faculty played a role in Michael Williams's motivation. According to Michael Williams, classroom pressure surfaced as a positive accelerant in his ability to continue to pursue college achievement, and his instructors also seemed to challenge him educationally as well.

Likewise, Michael shared how organizational support through his instructors proved helpful and encouraging. Michael also found that if he was willing to ask, his instructors were willing to assist and support him by identifying examples of his exhibited strengths or skills. His words also demonstrated that Michael had not been aware of how willing his instructors would be to assist.

Sunny shared another example of organizational support, saying:

Oh, it's been amazing. I was able to connect by meeting and like talking to different faculty, was able to connect, get engaged with more faculty so they could help my student success." He continues to share, "Yeah, so I have used SI (Supplemental Instruction) for years, which I like, supplemental learning sessions...sessions that the TAs put on that are outside of the class for help students who like just need extra help. I definitely feel like that's an outstanding service. Because not everybody learns at the same pace, I'm definitely one of these people. The Multicultural Student office I did not use as much as other students have, but I definitely do appreciate it just being there.

The students are aware of all possible institutional resources that are available to aid them in their success. While, Axel Foley gave an example of how he considers himself like a “leech”; “Everyone has been supportive of me even when I meet strangers and tell them what I’m doing with my life they are pretty supportive.” After a follow-up question about how the support manifested through words of encouragement, Axel shared these encouraging words that had made a difference to him: “Yeah, you are making a good choice. You’re following a good plan.” In these interactions, the students are getting affirmation and motivation from entities within the classroom setting, allowing for an extra push in the right direction. Additional interactions are a part of motivating students; for the development of the whole student many support services, programs, and organizations are available. Ali shares a similar story about involvement as a motivator but he talked about student organizations instead of classrooms:

I think Student Involvement. I say Student Involvement because I see a lot of these students at a lot of these campus events that I talked to and then as impacted my success, because then in turn, we are forming study groups with one another. We are meeting with each other after class. It has impacted me I think, even through when I got my associates when I started becoming involved when I started seeking help as my GPA was has really skyrocketed from there. So it’s I think Student Involvement really has, I know I tell, involvement was endless for me. So I took advantage of it a lot and it’s because I make time for this because it’s helping me at my academics and so, I appreciate it.

Also the Multicultural Student Affairs office. And, that’s because, there’s, there is a space where we, I can be comfortable and, you know, see students like me and, you know, I..I appreciate spaces like that at a lot of institutions, but mainly here because we need spaces like that after class just to go to a Multicultural Student Affairs Office and just debrief. And really sit and relax, and just talk, I think helps. I think multicultural student affairs definitely has helped me. (Ali)

In a third example of external motivators, family network support systems, the literature confirmed this finding that participants valued the support from their relatives.

They helped them to be goal-oriented when it came to their academic and professional futures. Their relatives gave them encouragement and supported them financially, too. Having their family members have positive expectations for the participants helped them to stay focused. Hurbert Perry acknowledged his family as the primary motivation: “Uh um...mostly parents and family. They are most, like, my biggest motivation. That’s why I stay focused and do well, and you know, I just pretty much do my best in every class. And, that’s my biggest push.” Likewise, Axel Foley’s words also reflected a student whose chief motivation was family. “I think my family did a really good job of hammering into me you need a college degree, so I got to do this for them.” He noted the importance of not letting them down. Thus, he continued to focus as a result of his family’s encouragement. Awareness of family support’s impact can provide a lens to view examples of college students’ motivation to keep persisting to reach degree completion.

In contrast, Island Man used negative feedback from others to fuel his success as he reported that: “there are people...people that did not expect me to be here in this situation right now, so I say the haters are my motivators.” Island Man appeared to have turned difficult situations into a fueling agent as he dealt with negative experiences. He seemed to be motivated to achieve set outcomes due to damaging or altering support from others. According to self-determination theory (SDT), competence is among the three basic psychological needs essential for one’s well-being and optimal functioning, and the frustration of these needs is theoretically predicted to induce a restorative response (Fang et al., 2018). Therefore, Island Man’s restorative response to the frustration he feels from knowing that there are some unfavorable views towards him, allows for a response of triggering a source of self-motivation to achieve more than before. Mentorship can make a

difference for Black male students as well in terms of external motivation; Ali not only spoke about the support he received from all his instructors, but he specifically noted the power of having a Black faculty member who encouraged and motivated him to do more.

...and then that's how I got through it was to make that a common habit. Like I'm gonna go to, and then I started, he started to teach me, you know, tips and techniques and then to where I didn't have to go as often [visit the professor], because I could see growth and they'd see growth, and my professors could see growth.

Bob Patrick remarked the need for mentoring:

I think mentorship programs, like serious mentorship programs, not just programs, that mentorship is attached to the name, you know, but people, people that are coming in, and they're sharing their experiences, you know, professors and even alumni who've, you know, been through the universe's university system, got out into the real world worked. If they could come back and offer some type of practical mentorship program, not just Hey, life is hard, you're gonna have to figure it out.

For both Bob Patrick and Ali, mentors served a vital role as motivators, which aided in them in navigating the education space, seeing individuals who have gone before them and believing that they can as well.

Organizational support emerged as necessary motivation for these male students because it signaled the institution's investment. The influence of organizational members, whether peers or faculty, illustrated that support via encouragement, motivation, or mentorship proved beneficially relevant and necessary among these students.

Support and Belonging

The benefit of interactions also emerged in the theme of Support and Belonging in the study and highlighted that the faculty and staff support reflected acts of encouragement, recognition, motivation, and challenges to growth. The support networks from family members, peers, teachers, and institutions were central to the participants' success.

Establishing positive relationships and making connections through campus associations and

major-related organizations provided opportunities to access academic and social enrichment resources. Huddled within networks of support systems, the participants were successfully navigating through college.

The participants in this research had commonalities when the subject of supports was mentioned. All participants mentioned support from peers and support from the teacher or staff member. Their families also offered support in one form or another; and the participants found support through involvement with peers, professors, and some university agencies. Island Man received support from within the Multicultural Student Affairs Office (MSA), the African American Cultivating Excellence mentoring program (AACE), and having support through track and field. He discussed how one staff member, in particular, helped him throughout his first year at Mid Western. When he is upset or worried, he said he could go to this staff member and get realistic but optimistic advice. He was very reassuring and helpful when putting things into perspective for Island Man. His peers were also supportive in that they were inquisitive about his situation and how they could make it easier or how they could be supportive at times. He also said, “It was nice to be able to call them and talk to them. I like having that relationship outside of my home life.” The following section details the subcategories of support and belonging as an overarching theme. These include the feeling of acceptance, family influence, peer interactions, and building connections.

The Feeling of Acceptance

Feeling accepted appeared relevant as a feature of the Support and Belonging theme among the participants and proved meaningful in sustaining degree persistence. Relating to college, Strayhorn (2017) coined this as a sense of belonging, which creates a space of support, allowing students to feel safe, valued, respected, and have an experience of personal

matter. Feeling connected and a part of the university was an important consideration that fueled these students' persistence at Mid Western. Lack of a sense of belonging can account for why nontraditional Black men leave college (Strayhorn, 2008, 2017). Students' apparent connections in their college experiences add favorably to the learning setting as they try to acquire an education, which instills growth, directly encouraging interactions at the institution (Caplan & Ford, 2014; Wang et al., 1997). But, 2727 reported feeling highly accepted here:

Mid Western is way more diverse than my high school. This is something that I experienced when I came to Mid Western. I was one out of four Black males in my school and no Black instructors. If any, it would have been one. Here my peers and instructors are diverse. This is something that I welcomed.

It was important for Michael to see others who looked like him as well as others from other cultures.

I mean, the school is predominantly white. But the place I feel most comfortable is probably the Student Union. Because I mean, we have the MSA (Multicultural Student Affairs Office) and there's a, you know, there's a lot more diversity in the Student Union. So I didn't feel like I didn't belong anywhere. But I felt more included at the Student Union.

At a primarily White institution, an emphasis on celebrating cultural differences can inspire feelings of support and belonging. Diversity and access to cultural opportunities signaled a necessary aspect of feeling accepted for 2727 and Michael.

Ali found belonging in the ways that the university supported him. He expressed this thought: "Oh, I feel very supported like they want me to succeed. I feel like they want me to be something and achieve my goals." Similarly, Josh shared why he felt a part of Mid Western: "I feel very accepted here because they're always willing to help you with open arms anytime I need to do or get something done....They were right here with me." In their

words, Josh and Ali illustrated the value of experiencing support and acceptance in their college experience. These feelings were echoed by John:

This Midwest institution does a great job. I think number one thing, whether we're in library spaces, whether we are in, in our dining areas, whether we are in the [Berry] Student Success Center, these spaces all I think is accepting so I haven't...I haven't figured out a space yet that I haven't felt accepted, uncomfortable or not supported.
(John)

The above quote show how the students are making their own belonging because of their mindset. It was apparent that all participants, without exception, felt a sense of connectedness with the institution in many respects. Participants expressly discussed good and gratifying experiences; others expressed feelings of belonging in addition to appreciation. Of importance was the positive and enthusiastic manner of the participants overall. Connections in and out of class impact engagement influences. How the students see themselves fitting into the academic setting is a worthy consideration in identifying engagement opportunities. In addition to seeking academic progression at Mid Western, feeling connected and a part of the university was an important consideration that fueled 2727, Ali, and Josh's persistence. For example, Josh confided:

you know, just how I didn't have anyone that looked like me that was my professors. That was my counselors. I had one professor, and he was a visiting professor, you know, out of all the courses, and they just think that, that makes a difference and to feel like, you know, that this is achievable [being successful in courses] and feeling connected to that professor.

The above quote illustrates the notion of congruence and believing even through the support of one. Students want to see themselves in positions of power and leadership, aiding the sense of belonging. The lack of concept is influencing students in a negative way and increases isolation. A willingness from the institution to help these students must be evident

and ongoing to communicate a commitment to the institution's part to engagement. The students in the study articulated ways that Mid Western could encourage more engagement by increasing diversity among its instructional faculty.

Peer interactions

Peer interaction is another focus of the Support and Belonging theme. Such interactions can boost engagement and participants in an organization for Black males (Brooms & Davis, 2017). In this finding, participants described how friendships and peer connections developed in the educational organization proved beneficial. Goings (2016) discovered that nurturing campus environments and the support of peers and faculty contributed to Black males' ability and motivation to embrace educational opportunities in conjunction with a natural desire to gain better avenues to support themselves and their families. A few participants shared examples of how peer interactions proved helpful in their quest to continue their education path. Blue Waters shared that interactions in class with students contributed to his ability to continue pursuing a degree: "Oh, yeah, because they believe in me." He also noted in a follow-up question about a specific way his peers motivated and supported him: "I want to say, it is like a challenge, you know. And, it is like they boost me over, and so I have to improve, even more, meet that high expectation." Likewise, Bob Patrick expressed that the influence of peer interactions was a routine collaboration that proved helpful:

The interactions like...it's pretty much a team-orientated thing and pretty much every...Well,...you have engineering teams, race teams, so pretty much my degree and program of study is working with a team.

These examples illustrated the power of peer interactions from fellow students as a motivating source for these nontraditional Black male students. Throughout the interviews,

participants told of the impact of relationships with their friends on campus. The focus was often on how relationships with friends supported them in their desire to become successful students. Ali said it clearly:

Okay. What I can say is um, the people I've met here. Because I've met, I've met like, genuinely beautiful people, like beautiful people and it's like....And that is definitely like helped me throughout all of my years here. Like friends-wise. Friends, Friends and like faculty...I've met genuinely nice people who are willing to do whatever for you to help you. Like a great support system here.

Although relying on oneself and achieving in college on one's own, the concept of relying on oneself differs because the people that the participants turned to were from similar cultural backgrounds. They were quite interested in being a part of the Black community and sought out fraternities, academic clubs, and cultural clubs that focused on their heritage.

Although limited, these means proved to be useful for them because they felt welcome.

"They had nothing to prove and felt that they chose to associate with and reach out to for help and had confidence in their abilities." In this quote, Blue Waters spoke of his network at school like family members and sounded very appreciative to have them in his life. Gratitude for supportive friends was prevalent in the interviews.

Bob Patrick felt that having certain friends could change how well you did in school also, but because of different reasons.

By adopting the right study habits of close friends, knowing when to work on one's work and relaxing became a more comfortable choice. Life is a giant teamwork process in the sense that you are always going to be talking to somebody, working with somebody. So, um, if you could find close friends that you know have great habits, even just to talk to, and share ideas, and tell you that, you know, that could sound better, or you should probably do it like this, or I do not know how to do that, but I do, so, I could show you how to do it ... So, it's a teaching and giving experience at the same time.

In this example, Bob Patrick demonstrates that it was not that he was not humble enough to accept assistance and ideas from others. He appreciated the need for him to work with others and learn from others. However, because of his life experience, he just felt more comfortable choosing study partners that were also Black. Bob Patrick defended this position by saying that that is another aspect, especially for engineering majors, because there are not many Blacks in engineering.

So, like it's kind of hard, you know, depending on where you come from to feel comfortable asking other people for help or feel comfortable, you know, branching out into a different friend group that you're not really as like comfortable with.

Bob Patrick and most others heavily engaged themselves in close friendships and clubs, despite having few Black male colleagues in his major. Branching out into relationships with White students as friends and study partners seemed complicated for various reasons. However, they managed to persist through college successfully in their own way, by not straying far from their communities but also by joining in and sharing their academic experience with other Black male students.

Family Influence

Family influence is a significant measure within the primary category of Support and Belonging, and it appeared to secure these students' ability to persist toward degree completion. Blue Waters, Michael, Omar Williams, and Sunny provided examples of how family influence inspired their college achievement and continual pursuit of degree completion.

Omar Williams expressed how influential his family was in his pursuit of a college degree: "Mostly my family. They've always been pushing us as my family that we should all go to college and complete a degree and become someone important in life. So, we all plan to

go to college.” Like Omar, Sunny also noted how his family played an influential role in his ability to pursue his college goals: “Oh they’re very supportive. They are proud of me. I have an internship, and they’re happy about that because they see me making moves and trying to get better at stuff. Yeah.” Additionally, Sunny acknowledged his family as a primary supporter in pursuing a degree at Mid Western. According to Sunny:

I’d say yes, my mother, she doesn’t stay in the same state as me, but she lives in New York. She and also my father, my stepmother, they are all super supportive of me. They help me out whenever they can. I don’t think I’ll be here without them at all. So, I thank them for all that.

Similarly, Blue Waters spoke to the support of family as a measure of support. He shared:

“My whole family is always encouraging me. They are always pushing me, and they tell me not to shy away from things, and that has been very motivating.” Michael described an example of his family support as:

Well, let me start off by saying this. Everybody in my family, starting off at one of my aunts, is a teacher. So, everybody is continually encouraging me. Michael, finish your degree. Michael, finish your diploma. You’re almost there. Congratulations, you’ve passed all your tests with flying colors.

These accounts underscored the value and power of family influence and support as these male students continue their education. All of these participants acknowledged family influence in their accounts. The family influence appears to be a valuable component of these students’ ability to continue working toward degree completion.

Building Connections and Relationships

According to the participants in this study, establishing relationships and building connections with key stakeholders were critical factors that facilitated their successful navigation through college. The respondents unanimously observed and stressed that college

was difficult and that successful navigation required connections with others, both socially and academically.

Participation in departments, organizations, clubs, fraternities, and religious affiliation were identified as avenues to establish vital relationships and make connections. Participation in academic major-related organizations such as the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) for engineering majors, MSA office, and fraternities were classified as very significant in academic achievement. Through such organizations, the participants received vital information about their majors and tutoring and mentoring from professionals in the field. This conclusion supported previous research studies that students' involvement in student organizations and extracurricular activities enhanced students' college retention from disadvantaged backgrounds (Donahoo & Caffey, 2010; Harper, 2012; Robertson & Mason, 2008).

Many of the participants actively participated in events through the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs on campus. This department offers students of all races a place for academic and social support. Several spoke of the staff there as being genuinely concerned individuals who sought to help them in any way possible to succeed. They even offered cultural programming, which offered time to bond with other students and administrators. Through these opportunities, participants grew close to the administration and felt that they looked out for their best interests. Charles St. Louis spoke about how they impacted his college career.

The MSA office here is accommodating because if it was not for MSA, in terms of like the "Lounge" and village spaces and programs they have started up and the trips and everything like that, um,...I probably would not have been as motivated to get involved. Which was a huge thing; I wanted to remain involved especially being a part of some organizations.

Not only did the MSA office on campus provide a safe place for Charles to be himself and meet others who were like him, but he felt empowered to take on leadership positions on campus:

I'm a member of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity Incorporated. I am the Vice President of Men of Color. I used to be an NAACP. I'm in a NPAC as well and oh, um, AACE program. African Americans cultivating excellence. It's a mentoring program.

It is important to note that some of the participants joined groups regardless of the background of the group's people. They felt that the benefits of joining on-campus organizations outweighed the need for them to be with predominantly African American students. Michael Williams thought that since he was African American, he had a right to join any group he wanted to and did not let others dictate his choices for clubs. Michael Williams disclosed that when asked for advice he would give others coming to college with a similar background, he stated:

So, definitely, my advice would be, again, be strong. You have the support system, and if you feel like you don't, just go around. Join groups. That is what I'll say to, join groups that are more to your, more to your um, to your ethnicity. More to who you are. Even if it's not to your ethnicity, join groups that you feel like joining a computer science group, go and join a computer science group. If you wanna join um, singing group, go ahead. Like, on our campus, we have all kinds of groups, we have a radio or pray groups if you wanna do that, go ahead. Nobody is stopping you. Only person that's stopping you is yourself. And don't let anybody put you in a box where it's just like, okay, that's just another White boy. No. Like, you are a Black man first, and, you're gonna do—you're gonna do great things. You just have to believe in yourself, you just have to power through.

Even though Michael Williams preferred to associate with students with similar backgrounds, he recommended that nontraditional Black males join any organization that interested them. According to him and other participants, the ties that they will make in these groups will help sustain them throughout their college careers.

Through participation in associations and campus clubs, participants developed group affinity and a sense of maintaining the group's ideals. This affinity has positive impacts on the participants' academic achievements and social developments. All the participants stated that due to their involvement in students' organizations, their academic achievements improved.

John, Sunny, and Charles St. John attributed their academic success to their Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity membership. "I am a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated, where our brotherhood keeps focused on maintaining high GPAs" (Charles St. John). The fraternity required a minimum GPA requirement for membership. Campus organizations fostered a supportive system of a support network that enhanced their members' academic achievement and social integration. Participants Michael, Island Man, Hurbert Perry, Bob Patrick, and Michael Williams all participate in NSBE, allowing exposure to the field of engineering as a Black professional. The organizations provide enrichment programs and opportunities, which the participants identified as critical factors that enhanced successful navigation through college. Figure 2 highlights some of the sentiments the participants expressed about support and belonging.

Figure 2.

Support and Belonging

The Feeling of Acceptance	<p>“The MSA office here is accommodating because if it was not for MSA, in terms of like the “Lounge” and village spaces and programs they have started up and the trips and everything like that, um,...I probably would not have been as motivated to get involved. Which was a huge thing; I wanted to remain involved especially being a part of some organizations.” (Charles St. John)</p> <p>“I feel very accepted here because they’re always willing to help you with open arms anytime I need to do or get something done....They were right here with me.”(Josh)</p>
Peer Interactions	<p>“Everyone has been supportive of me even when I meet strangers and tell them what I’m doing with my life they are pretty supportive.” (Axel Foley)</p> <p>“Yeah, you are making a good choice. You’re following a good plan.” (Axel Foley)</p>
Family Influence	<p>“Well, let me start off by saying this. Everybody in my family, starting off at one of my aunts is a teacher. So, everybody is continually encouraging me. Michael, finish your degree. Michael, finish your diploma. You’re almost there. Congratulations, you’ve passed all your tests with flying colors.” (Michael)</p> <p>They help me out whenever they can. I don’t think I’ll be here without them at all. So, I thank them for all that.” (Sunny)</p>
Building Connections	<p>“So, definitely, my advice would be, again, be strong. You have the support system, and if you feel like you don’t, just go around. Join groups. That is what I’ll say to, join groups that are more to your, more to your um, to your ethnicity. More to who you are. Even if it’s not to your ethnicity, join groups that you feel like joining a computer science group, go and join a computer science group. If you wanna join um, singing group, go ahead. Like, on our campus, we have all kinds of groups, we have a radio or pray groups if you wanna do that, go ahead. Nobody is stopping you. Only person that’s stopping you is yourself. And don’t let anybody put you in a box where it’s just like, okay, that’s just another White boy. No. Like, you are a Black man first, and, you’re gonna do—you’re gonna do great things. You just have to believe in yourself, you just have to power through.” (Michael Williams)</p>

Limitations

Though I had previously anticipated limitations to my study (see Chapter 1) a new limitation presented itself once I completed participant recruitment. Namely, in the study, three-quarters of the participants were Caribbean natives. This raised the concern whether their perspectives would be the same as those of other Black males, themselves having voluntarily immigrated to the U.S., whereas the domestic Black male participants would have a heritage of forced migration through enslavement. Voluntary immigration is referred to as a movement based on one's free will and initiative instead of forced immigration or descendants of those from slavery. Different people who are Black have different experiences of race relations and their own understanding of Blackness and what it means to be Black on campus in the U.S. With this, the perspective of the Black race is expressed through those experiences. Each student's perception of their success story is expressed through their own experiences of being a Black male and that may also include their migration experience or their immigration heritage. Therefore, the perspective of international students may vastly differ from those of domestic Black students. This is a limitation in a sense because it introduces another aspect of difference into the population of students in the study. However, it also represents a strength of the study; more and more students are being recruited from the Caribbean, and these students are "seen" and "treated" as African American, perhaps up to and only until they open their mouths, which therefore shifts the experience of these students and how they understand and respond to that shift.

Summary

The 14 nontraditional Black male students who were interviewed for this study expressed that they realized academic success at the Mid Western University despite

multifaceted obstacles. This qualitative research study sheds light on the perceived factors influencing nontraditional Black male students' persistence to reach college completion. The study drew on Harper's (2015) invitation to ponder these male students' success through anti-deficit aspects to shift the emphasis from Black men's disadvantages. This chapter presented the research data, results, and evolving themes or categories. All participants revealed that specific intrinsic motivation and external measures made a difference in their ability to persist toward degree completion at the University. Value and Belief and Support and Belonging emerged as two categories or themes, highlighting the internal and external factors that enabled their own persistence or successful academic outcomes. The next chapter summarizes the project, theoretical and practical recommendations emerging from the study, its limitations, and possible future research recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As I conclude this research study and reflect on the journey as a heuristic researcher, I begin by reflecting on the research study's initial purpose. By exploring and analyzing the participants' college experiences, I gained more reflective insights into what it means to be a successful nontraditional Black male through my interactions with the participants. A practical goal of this study is to expand university administrators' knowledge regarding the collegiate experiences of nontraditional Black male students' experiences to assist institutions in supporting the growth and development of Black males while also increasing their recruitment and retention into tertiary education. As an individual who identifies as a successful nontraditional Black male student, I knew I would have to maintain an open mind and contain my biases as I engaged with the participants. It was important to me that their stories emerge as they had voiced them to me. I could not help, however, feeling a deep sense of pride and admiration for every single one of the men I interviewed. I felt a sense of encouragement as I witnessed how highly motivated they were about ensuring their success as a college student. I witnessed this not just through their words but also through their body language, intonations, and words.

Hearing the responses of these 14 promising, successful nontraditional Black male college students was validation that I had selected the most appropriate conceptual framework for my study. Immersed in anti-deficit thinking and with a resolve to help dispel stereotypes of Black male intellectual incapacity, my study's findings revealed their capacity for college success. The journey is near to my heart because it helped me analyze the participants' experiences and more closely understand aspects of my own learning, preferences, needs, and

even behaviors that I exhibit in my life. As Harper (2010) maintained, it is inappropriate to use theory to belabor Black male students' deficiencies. Instead, he suggested that theory explains how Black males have established viable relationships and connections with college personnel and can be used to describe the individuals, opportunities, and resources that propelled their achievement. In this way, my study joins a continued effort in encouraging more researchers to adopt an anti-deficit approach to studying Black male student success. The success phenomenon was an aspect that I as a student never considered as I moved through educational systems. However, through this reflection, it is a network of intricate paths and turns that is a perceptive component of our lived experiences, whether acknowledged by us or not.

Purpose

The purpose of this critical heuristic inquiry was to understand and share the stories of nontraditional Black male students' experiences during college and to identify what contributed to their success at a PWI. My goal of collecting personal accounts from successful nontraditional Black male students about their college experiences at Mid Western University was to give voice to their successful experiences and, in doing so, allow college professors, education administrators, policymakers, and program organizers to utilize these findings to perhaps change the lens with which institutions like Mid Western view these students and to advance their decision making processes for nontraditional Black college men. The stories of 14 nontraditional Black male college students, facilitated through interviews, represent a recap of stories about their college experiences and their views on what helped them succeed. The thick, rich, descriptive data collected, coupled with the findings derived from the data analysis, provide a sound foundation for making recommendations for action and further future studies

by analyzing the participant interviews and open coding to highlight emerging themes in the data.

Following are the research questions coupled with a summary of the respective answers:

1. How do nontraditional Black male students define success?

When thinking about success in the college setting, one would expect individuals to primarily speak about grade point average (GPA) and grades. However, for the participants of this study, GPA and grades were far from the discussion. The nontraditional Black males of this study had a more holistic view of their definition of success. Success was defined through alternative measures such as navigating college and a sense of community and pride through social integration. The meaning of success at college and life is a complex process that often involves a balance. Success was felt as a sense of accomplishment. Although students did not discount the importance of good grades or degree attainment, their narratives indicated that grades are not the only meaningful aspect of college success; participants also indicated that personal development was an essential measure of success. This sentiment was succinctly captured by Michael's statement when he noted, "I think college is all about finding who you are as a person." Participants' responses revealed the importance of achieving academic success, becoming socially integrated, and developing a sense of self-sufficiency and freedom.

2. What are the college experiences of successful nontraditional Black male students at Mid Western University?

In terms of their college experiences, the participants highlighted participation in student organizations and attendance at campus events, demonstrating ways they were engaged on campus. Students spoke of enhancing leadership skills and networking with fellow students as members of student organizations. They also shared that the teaching and interactions they

received in the class enabled them to succeed in their courses and other campus engagements. Participants reported that their class participation, involvement in class projects, and immersion in activities and organizations helped them feel a sense of belonging at Mid Western, not to mention a sense of connection with faculty and staff. The presence of Black professors typically enhances the level of engagement in the classroom; however, nontraditional Black males have relied on their interactions outside of the classroom, especially with Black professors, for their social adjustment.

3. To what internal and external factors do nontraditional Black male students attribute to their college success?

Participants suggested several reasons for their college success. Relationships with faculty and staff were a recurring theme. Participants also expressed positive sentiments about specific campus personnel, indicating many Black faculty and staff members' own collegiate experiences are often similar to those experienced by many nontraditional Black male students. As a result of those lived experiences, participating in informal mentoring activities remains essential for many Black faculty members (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Participants have identified mentoring and professional development opportunities as essential ventures to their experiences and learning, both cognitive and noncognitive (such as drive and determination). Several studies have identified faculty mentors and role models as institutional agents that provide critical sociocultural capital for Black males in college (Cuyjet, 2006b; Dancy, 2010; Guiffrida, 2005; Moore & Toliver, 2010). Bringing together students and invested faculty members (and role models) creates a community that offers alternative images of what it means to be Black men, provides a safe place for self-expression, and contributes critical support for Black males' academic efforts (Brooms, 2016; Strayhorn, 2008). Further, intrinsic and external motivation

was present in students' discussion of what led to their success. Finally, students attributed their engagement on campus as instrumental to their success.

Participants in this study found many ways to attribute their success. However, as I listened to them, I was struck that they described their unique strategic approach to success that they could only have found through their own skills and abilities. Listening to these students describe their approaches confirmed that there are many ways that Black males can and do navigate the university successfully. Universities would be well-served to first listen to their students and recruit more Black into their realm; to ensure that faculty, staff, and leadership are diverse, so students are more open to engaging with them.

Discussion

Ramon B. Goings (2015) called for action on behalf of nontraditional Black male undergraduates and asked, "if researchers and practitioners continue to ask deficit-oriented questions, how can they expect anything other than deficit-oriented results?" (p. 122). Additionally, he urged researchers and practitioners that they have an opportunity to learn from academically successful adult Black men attending postsecondary institutions, stating not only can the perspectives of these men inform on-campus decisions regarding how to support the larger Black male student population better, but their insights may also give institutions a glimpse into Black men's motivations for furthering their education. Universities can use this information—like that gathered in the present study—to develop targeted recruitment efforts for adult Black male college students. As researchers, we must begin to take a different approach, one that explores the successes of Black men at various points in their lives, not just early adulthood. It is time for a change, which I hope starts with my study. This study was prompted to answer Goings' call and add to this research body through a concept I call "flooding."

Flooding

Flooding attempts to increase and overflow positive information, thoughts, and/or encouragement to and of individuals (in this case Black males) to achieve and believe in something positive, especially onto a usually negative landscape of ideas. Floods inundate whole areas by simply overwhelming with water; in this case the flood inundates using the simple technique of repetition. Repetitive positive words of affirmation are key to flooding by instilling the belief of a can-do attitude (Diedrich, 2010; Maclellan, 2005; Sigler & Aamidor, 2005). Repetition is a crucial learning aid because it helps transition a belief from the conscious to the subconscious (Birtwell et al., 2019). The more times an event occurs, the more traces of that event are placed in memory. So, therefore, repetition will improve this new learning and belief by finding that at least one instance of an event becomes more believable when there are more instances of encouraging events. So, building the law of positive repetition would allow for the affirmation to be more powerful, with the intent that pervasive negative messaging will wither away and no longer be reinforced. Therefore, this can result in one of the most effective tools for individual success. One important outcome of this study is to begin to flood the literature with success stories in response to the call of Harper (2009) and Goings (2015) to overwhelm the deficit narrative with stories of successful Black men.

Relationships Matter

When asked to describe their experiences at Mid Western, all participants provided stories using detailed accounts of their own lived experiences on campus. Relationships were a key factor among all participants: All of them discussed professional and familial relationships they held dear with professors, staff, family, and peers. These included emotions of gratitude and belonging as well as relationships they had developed with faculty

and staff. Faculty and staff are known to be significant contributors to student success and when students can make connections with them they are more likely to succeed (Brooms, 2016; Harper, 2015; Strayhorn, 2008); a fact borne out in this study as well. However, only a few participants spoke about having a professional or research relationship with their professors. This is a concern, as student connectedness with faculty is offered as a factor of persistence for Black male students (Harper, 2012; Mosby, 2009). All participants stated the need to have an individual, preferably a Black male, staff member, to have as their “go-to” mentor on campus and spoke very fondly of how influential this mentor was to their success.

Further, several studies have connected Black male student success with family relationships and support (e.g., Harper, 2012 and Mosby, 2009), suggesting that solid relationships between mothers and their Black male sons have a positive influence on the son’s persistence and success. This association implies that students who have strong relationships with their families are motivated by the support and genuine interest in seeing them succeed, are desirous of making their families proud of them, and, therefore, strive toward that end (Wood, 2012).

In this study, participants’ stories and corresponding findings indicated that deep, personal motivation and yearning to succeed in college and make something of themselves contributed to these students’ success, especially when compared to their peers. Driving forces in participants’ success were intrinsic motivation coupled with family and cultural/environmental pushes. Harper and Newman (2016) indicated that a strong work ethic and commitment to succeed were important influences on Black male college success. The six Caribbean participants’ families credited education as being a valued part of their background. Therefore, that aspect of their culture was a part of their motivation to succeed

in college. Participants who grew up in the inner-city commented on childhood peers who were idle and unproductive are a constant reminder of the negative societal views. These students decisively expressed that seeing their peers in such a situation was a driving force in their constructive pursuits. Participants were motivated toward success in significant part because of their desire to counteract negative stereotypes. In addition to familial motivation and counteracting stereotypes, participants were also motivated by non-cognitive experiences such as interactions with peers, personality traits and personal goals, aptitude, and other cognitive measures found in Palmer and Young (2009).

Ethnicity as an Essential Factor

The findings of this inquiry amplify the research participants' voices about their experiences and reasons for success while enrolled at Mid Western University. Even though there were no notable contradictions between my findings and prior literature, there was a distinct finding in my research study: students' ethnicity mattered deeply. Over half of the participants were international students. Three-quarters of these were Caribbean natives or of Caribbean descent; each shared that their ethnicity was a factor that contributed to their college success. These Caribbean participants emphasized they were all first-generation college students and that the importance of education was instilled in them as youths. They each knew it was expected that they would complete high school. They shared that it was known in Caribbean families that one had to place emphasis on one's education. That sense of purpose was a motivating factor for their college success at Mid Western. This aligns with other literature on Caribbean students, which has shown that individuals from the islands place a strong emphasis on education (Calzada et al., 2015). International parents often adhere to an immigration ethos that leads to high aspirations for their children's academic

achievement. Students in this study carried this familial encouragement with them to university in the United States.

The Importance of Role Models

The conceptual framework of this research study was based on anti-deficit theory. Anti-deficit thinking theory contradicts deficit thinking theory and identifies factors such as instructional practices, societal and environmental factors, institutional, curricular, and co-curricular policies as the factors associated with student success (Gourd & Lightfoot, 2009). Anti-deficit thinking recognizes the determination required on the part of students to succeed in school, but it also acknowledges that education is appreciably associated with schools' socio-political and economic conditions (Harper, 2012). Connections made between Black students and Black role models who have been successful in higher education can increase self-efficacy of Black students and lead to academic success (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Just as in that study, the participants shared examples of their needs for support in navigating college spaces. They discussed support systems, mentors, and colleagues who assisted them with navigating through the system. Each of my participants spoke of teaching and mentoring, not to mention the relationships that emerged as vital to their success. Many researchers stress that a role model is vital to support students through educational attainment and life. More Black male educators need to be groomed to diversify existing educational systems (Chun & Evans, 2018). Chun and Evans hypothesized that the lack of Black leaders in the educational setting had supported the “glass ceiling” approach for males. Black men aspire to succeed, and would enhance their academic strides further with the presence of more leading males in their lives. A mentor for Black male college students can increase college persistence as academic support (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Mentorship is crucial for

Black male college students as the deficiency of positive male connection causes some Black adult men to develop fears of being social and the inability to interact among peers, causing difficulty in pursuing and obtaining college degrees and subsequently obtaining and sustaining employment.

This study confirms the significance of role modeling; a strong support network is a consistent thread in Black males' college success literature. Black males at universities attributed their success to the availability of solid supportive relationships with faculty, staff, and peers on campus, affirming prior studies (Cuyjet, 2006b; Harper, 2003; Strayhorn, 2017).

Anti-Deficit Theory as a Framework and Lens

This study emphasized using an approach that focused on what is working well to support the success of nontraditional Black male students. It is not a Pollyanna view, but rather these males have a mindset that chooses to identify spaces for support and belonging; they seek ways to be successful. The notion of removing a stop sign (barrier) does not provide a direction for someone to go—it just allows them not to stop. Amplifying success strategies is putting up directional signs that say “here are some ways you can go to be successful”—they are green lights. Removing barriers just removes stop signs; research such as the present study provides a new direction for universities to move students toward success, not simply stop them from failure.

Thus, the anti-deficit achievement framework (Harper, 2012) is used in studies in socialization and readiness, college achievement, and post-college success and was used in this study not to ignore fault but instead to highlight how nontraditional Black male students are resilient despite structural, cultural, and personal barriers—at the same time, amplifying their voices and experiences as successful Black males. This study engaged 14 nontraditional

Black males nearing graduation from a single predominantly White institution in one-on-one interviews. The intent was not to be able to generalize but to share the narratives that were identified from the data collection; which were rich and descriptive, giving voice to students' perspectives on their college experiences and what made them successful college students to enhance opportunity and success for other who follow in their footsteps.

Recommendations for Action

Given the findings of this study, I recommend several initiatives to college administrators at institutions like Mid Western University to enhance the college experience for nontraditional Black male college students and propel them more readily toward persistence and college completion. Utilizing these findings, Mid Western university should examine its policies and procedures to consider enhancing its support services to ensure greater intention is placed on supporting nontraditional Black male students.

- Hold focus group sessions with nontraditional Black male students during their first weeks and on a scheduled, periodic basis to validate, support, and continually encourage students' intrinsic motivation and yearning to succeed in college. Engaging these students early within the time in the university creates a sense of students been seen and heard and inspires long term retention (Dewberry & Jackson, 2018)
- Formalize a mentoring program that would be a combination of peer and faculty/staff mentors. The more accessible a mentor and a go-to person are to students, the more opportunities they can establish to create formal and informal relationships and connectedness with the institution.

- Formalize partnerships with local Black community-based organizations such as 100 Black Men (100blckmen.org), the Black Chambers of Commerce (bccgkc.org), and professional Black male fraternities to build a pool of role models and mentors who could afford to shadow and internship opportunities to learn about and imagine themselves in successful careers.
- Establish student organizations that are specifically focused on promoting and supporting the ethnographic representation of students (i.e., African student clubs, Caribbean Student associations, or Black Student Union). Clubs may be argued to be divisive (McDougal et al., 2018); however, these serve to validate an essential element of ethnic and cultural pride for Black males, creating a safe place for interacting (Rosch & Collins, 2017).
- Use the stories gathered through this study as a basis for professional development for faculty and staff and as a means of familiarizing personnel with the perspectives of nontraditional Black male students. Exposing personnel to workshops on topics such as implicit bias would allow individuals who have attitudes towards people that associate them with stereotypes without conscious knowledge to be more personally aware (Payne et al. 2018). This would prompt personnel to reflect upon the nontraditional Black males encountered in their classrooms and service areas and how they might have supported them in more intentional ways. This might also prove to stimulate additional interest and conversations among faculty and staff around innovative ways to support these students.

The recommendations delineated above are logical and reasonable. They can be easily implemented at institutions if there is an institutional commitment to supporting Black male student success. Aligned with my recommendations is Tinto's (1998) theory, which essentially suggested that the more engaged students were with their peers, the faculty, and their colleges' social and academic functions, the more committed they were to staying and striving for success. Participants in my study exemplified the abovementioned attributes.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study highlighted important information related to the experiences of successful nontraditional Black male students. The findings herein provided deep insight into the college experiences of 14 nontraditional Black male college students and areas for potential future research. While the data shed light on the topic, more research is needed on the success strategies of nontraditional Black male students in higher education, especially those at PWIs. This study allowed me to illuminate the experiences of these nontraditional Black males; however, there is a need for future studies on this topic that could be enhanced by:

- Enhanced exploration of international student experiences. Given that nine participants were international students: three were Jamaican, two Bahamians, one Guyanese, one Canadian, and two were from the continent of Africa, a case study, with a focus on ethnography, could be conducted with a varied sample that includes students from different nationalities, to learn more about factors associated with their educational experiences from primary to college level and linkages to success.

- Descriptive understandings from faculty and staff. A narrative study could be undertaken to give voice to the perspectives of faculty and staff at Mid Western University around nontraditional Black male student academic and social integration on campus.
- Increasing the number of qualitative research studies to supplement the research on nontraditional Black males overall in higher education. This could include focus group interviews to allow participants to share their experience as a Black nontraditional student.
- Expanding the sites for data collection. Including more universities to provide a national perspective on nontraditional Black male students' experiences by geographic locations

Conclusion

This study sought to understand the meaningful experiences of successful nontraditional Black males in higher education who have persisted through at least three years at a predominantly White institution. A significant body of research focuses on Black male underachievement and educational failures; this one-sided emphasis on the educational crisis of Black males does not offer insight into those who navigate through the system successfully. Conversely, little research offers an anti-deficit view on nontraditional Black male achievement. Black males are not told how to navigate this realm to attain academic achievement and success or are seldom given instructions on overcoming the barriers that undermine their success. It was not vital for me to understand how nontraditional Black males make sense of the negative perceptions portrayed through academic data, social

identity labels, media, stereotypes, and microaggressions, but rather the opposite. This study offers contributions to an asset-based approach, successful mindset, and support for nontraditional Black males in succeeding academically and socially.

Research that accurately expresses the experiences of successful nontraditional Black male students is a scarcity. Research of the nature of the counternarrative to the negative societal image of this population is unique. There is even less research originating from the perspective of the nontraditional Black male himself. By engaging in this research, I understand and embrace the participants' experiences and reflect on my own experiences in higher education. Hearing these male students share their stories makes me know that I am not alone in the struggle, and for a moment, it allows me to change the generally negative narrative that plagues the Black male community. Nontraditional Black students have much to offer higher education institutions and our society, but we must first be supported as a valuable resource.

This research study gave voice to 14 nontraditional Black male college achievers, highly motivated and grateful for the opportunity and support they received as they persisted through college. The stories they shared are rich evidence that, indeed, nontraditional Black male students have ambition and are willing to work hard to earn college degrees and become contributing members of society. Stereotypes about Black males are indeed negated through the findings of this study. I hope this study will add to the breadth and scope of anti-deficit thinking as it pertains to nontraditional Black male students, those in academia, and society as a whole. This research study also has strengthened my belief that nontraditional Black male students must support one another, serve as a resource, offer mentorship, and make connections whenever we can. Although I already strive to assist and

mentor other nontraditional Black males, this study has revealed that we need more Black individuals, both as students and faculty and staff, to be hired and retained on campuses. For nontraditional Black males to feel a true sense of belonging and mattering, there must first be a level of trust. This can be achieved by hearing their concerns and listening and taking action when issues need to be addressed.

There is much work to be done regarding changing the narrative of Black males being plagued by educational attainment issues that begin in primary schooling and accumulate through secondary school to college. These students are disciplined, and they are a predominant population in exceptional education cohorts and classes, yet they are discouraged by teachers and guidance counselors from aspiring to college (Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008; Palmer, Davis, et al., 2010). I challenge the reader to reflect on your interactions with nontraditional Black male students and think about how they may feel after interacting with you. *Do they feel better or worse because of their encounter?*

We must understand the impact of each interaction we have with all students at our institution. It is clear that nontraditional Black male students are at higher educational institutions to obtain a degree just like all other students, but let us not forget that they are human and have feelings, thoughts, and desires just like everyone else. Higher education institutions need to ensure that nontraditional Black male students are not forgotten and must be included and supported. While we should never become complacent in advocating for those equitable conditions to persist, we must also continue to highlight our Black school boys and college men who are achieving and help change Black males' face in society. We need to hear the voices of all student populations for an institution to flourish successfully. Now is the time!

APPENDIX A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Consent to Participate in Research Study

Study Title:

Obtaining Gold: Experiences of Nontraditional Black Male Students at a PWI.

Authorized Study Personnel

Principal Investigator:

**Mr. Roland A. Hemmings, Jr., MA Office: 816-235-6243
Cell: 816-377-4163**

Secondary Investigator:

Dr. Tiffani Riggers-Piehl, Ph.D. Office: 816-235-2458

KEY INFORMATION

You are being asked to take part in this research study because you identify as a nontraditional black male student having at least one of the following characteristics: specifically, be least 24 years old, attend school part-time, be financially independent, work full time, have a GED instead of a high school diploma, delayed college enrollment, 1st generation student {first person in a family to attend college}, have dependents, veteran status, and/or have reentered a college program. In addition to nearing the completion of a bachelor's degree. Research studies are voluntary and only include people who choose to take part. The purpose of this research is aimed at highlighting the phenomenon of "success" as experienced by identified Black nontraditional male students. The total amount of time you would be in this study is 2 hours or 120 minutes. During your participation, you will be involved in a one on one semi-structured interview and a focus group. There are no benefits to you for taking part in this study. You have the alternative of not taking part in this study.

Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. As the researcher discusses this consent form with you, please ask him to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. Please talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this critical, heuristic inquiry is to explore the phenomenon of success as experienced by Black nontraditional males through the exploration and analysis of their higher education experiences while also changing the negative narrative of black males in colleges and universities. You have been invited to participate because you are:

1. A Black identifying male.
2. Have at least one characteristic of being non-traditional Black male (be least 24 years old, attend school part-time, be financially independent, work full time, have a

GED instead of a high school diploma, delayed college enrollment, 1st generation student {first person in a family to attend college}, have dependents, veteran status, and/or who have reentered a college program.).

3. Student nearing completion of a bachelor's degree.

By conducting this study, I will have the opportunity to help the world to hear the voices of these Black nontraditional males in an effort to provide support to higher education institutions in nurturing their success and retention of this population. Their stories are often unheard during their matriculation as students in college as the focus tends to be on the challenges they face. The results of this study can be utilized by educators and policy makers in order to provide more powerful approaches to assist with the recruitment and retention of more Black male students in colleges and universities.

There is a gap in the literature as it pertains to documentation of black men's success at colleges and universities and more so with a focus on those who are nontraditional. The proposed study hopes to help fill that gap.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

Approximately 20 people will take part in this study at UMKC.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?

You will participate in a 1-hour, one-to-one semi-structured interview session and 1-hour focus group.

Semi-structured interview - The participant will participate in an interview session that will last approximately 60 minutes. It will take place at the participant's choosing, a community setting, at the university or via Zoom. Each participant will choose a pseudonym prior to commencing the interview, which will be used throughout the process. All the questions should be considered optional and have the option at any time to refrain from answering any question. Participant interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. The interview recordings will be transcribed and then immediately be erased/destroyed. Interview transcripts will be kept on a password protected data drive in a locked safe in the researcher's locked office. All other data files including the transcriptions will be kept for 7 years after the completion of the study.

Focus Group interview- You will be brought together with other participants for our focus group Interview. At this time, we will discuss topics and issues that arise around being Black and Success. It will take place at the university or via Zoom. This will last for approximately 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded so that our group discussion can be captured and examined accurately. The interview recordings will be transcribed and then immediately be erased/destroyed. Interview transcripts will be kept on a password protected data drive in a locked safe in the researcher's locked office. All other data files including the transcriptions will be kept for 7 years after the completion of the study.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?

You will participate in a 1-hour, one-to-one semi-structured interview session and 1-hour focus group. You will be involved in this study for a total of 2 hours, which the data collection process will be concluded within an 8-week period.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

There are no physical risks associated with this study. There is, however, the potential risk of loss of confidentiality. Every effort will be made to keep your information confidential; however, this cannot be guaranteed.

Some of the questions we will ask you as part of this study may make you feel uncomfortable. You may refuse to answer any of the questions and you may take a break at any time during the study. You may stop your participation in this study at any time.

ARE THERE BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

As a participant in this study, you will have an opportunity to reflect on your experience related to success as it is experienced in the higher education setting or your own life. On a broader level, this study will contribute to the existing research on Black male success while also providing higher education educators and administrators that work with Black males a better understanding of how success is experienced at a predominantly white institution by this population. In doing so, institutions can then develop strategies that can be utilized to improve the recruitment and retention of Black males in colleges and universities. However, you may not get any benefit from being in this research study.

WILL MY INFORMATION BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

The University of Missouri System, Authorization No. 00-018 requires research data to be retained for 7 years after the final report. Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. To maintain your confidentiality, you will be referred by your chosen pseudonym in the interview and all other research documents. After your interview, recordings will be transcribed and then immediately be erased/destroyed. If you decide to leave the study early, which you may do at any time, all data collected from you will be destroyed. Interview transcripts will be kept on a password protected data drive in a locked safe in the researcher's locked office. The data will be stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and for 7 years after the study is complete.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS TO YOU?

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

WHAT ABOUT COMPENSATION?

There is no compensation offered to you for participating in the research study.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM DURING THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

Your well-being is a concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form. If you experience any emotional stress please contact,

Student Health and Wellness

Office; 816-235-6133

Email: studenthealth@umkc.edu

WHAT ABOUT MY RIGHTS TO DECLINE PARTICIPATION OR WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

You can choose to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you are entitled. However, if you decide to stop participating in the study, we encourage you to talk to the researcher first to make sure it is safe to do so.

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the researcher(s) or with the University of Missouri Kansas City.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled

WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the researcher(s) listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, or to discuss problems, concerns or suggestions related to your participation in the research, or to obtain information about research participant’s rights, contact the UMKC Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office

- Phone: (816) 235-5927
- Email: umkcirb@umkc.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

The purpose of this study, procedures to be followed, risks and benefits have been explained to me. I have been allowed to ask questions, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been told whom to contact if I have questions, to discuss problems, concerns, or suggestions related to the research, or to obtain information. I have read or had read to me this consent form and agree to be in this study, with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time. I have been told that I will be given a copy of this consent form.

I consent to participate in this research study

I do NOT consent to participate in this research study

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL



Institutional Review Board
University of Missouri-Kansas City

5319 Rockhill Road
Kansas City, MO 64110
816-235-5927
umkcirb@umkc.edu

August 12, 2020

Principal Investigator: Tiffani Riggers-Piehl
Department: Educ Ldrshp, Policy & Fndation

Your IRB Application to project entitled "Obtaining Gold: A Heuristic Inquiry on Successful Non Traditional Black male students at a Mid Western Predominantly white Institution." was reviewed and approved by the UMKC Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2025267
IRB Review Number	267354
Initial Application Approval Date	August 09, 2020
IRB Expiration Date	N/A
Level of Review	Expedited
Application Status	Approved
Project Status	Active - Open to Enrollment
Expedited Categories	45 CFR 46.110.a(f)(6) 45 CFR 46.110.a(f)(7)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
Type of Consent	Consent with Waiver of Documentation Consent Form
Approved Documents	updated_letter_to_prospective_participants.docx sample_key.docx focus_group_protocol.docx Updated Interview Protocol Interview Questions Dissertation Proposal Approval Form

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date (if applicable).
2. All unanticipated problems must be reported to the IRB on the Event Report within 5 business days of becoming aware of the problem. Unanticipated problems are defined as events that are unexpected, related or possibly related to the research, and suggests the research places subjects or others at a greater risk of harm than was previously known or recognized. If the unanticipated problem was a death, this is reportable to the IRB within 24 hours of notification of occurrence/becoming aware of occurrence.

3. On-site deaths that are not unanticipated problems must be reported within 5 days of awareness on the Death Report, unless the study is such that you have no way of knowing a death has occurred, or an individual dies more than 30 days after s/he has stopped or completed all study procedures/interventions and required follow-up.
4. All deviations (non-compliance) must be reported to the IRB on the Event Report within 5 business days of becoming aware of the deviation.
5. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce immediate risk. All changes must be submitted on the Amendment Form.
6. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
7. For studies requiring a Continuing Review Report (CRR) must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date. If the study is complete, the Completion/Withdrawal Form may be submitted in lieu of the CRR.
8. Securely maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date or longer depending on the sponsor's record keeping requirements.
9. If applicable, utilize the IRB stamped consent documents and other approved research documents located within the document storage section of eCompliance. These documents are highlighted green.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB at 816-235-5927 or umkcirb@umkc.edu.

Thank you,
UMKC Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Dear Sir,

My name is Roland Hemmings, Jr., and I am a doctoral student at the University of Missouri Kansas City conducting a qualitative study to gain insight into the experiences of successful nontraditional Black male students who are in their junior or senior year in college.

I will use the data collected in this study to add to the body of knowledge surrounding the experiences of Black nontraditional male students, with the hope that future prospective nontraditional Black male students will not only be given the support they need to succeed but that this research would highlight ways colleges can support these students in their pursuit of a 4-year degree.

Participation in this study is voluntary; therefore, you can elect to participate, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you become a study participant, I will ask you to share your experiences with me in two forms: in a narrative document, in which you describe your experiences as a nontraditional Black male student, and in an interview conducted by me, the student researcher.

If you decide to participate, I will meet with you individually to explain the study, purpose, risks, and safeguards, and to provide you with a consent form to participate in the study. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you may discontinue participation at any time. Your privacy will be maintained, and the completed research will not identify participants.

It is my sincere hope that you will elect to participate in this study. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please feel free to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Roland Hemmings, Jr.
UMKC Ed.D. Candidate

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

- 1) Greet participant
- 2) Give a reminder that they may stop participation/have the recording stopped at any time.

Hello. My name is Roland Hemmings. I am a doctoral student at the University of Missouri Kansas City. I'm here to learn about the experiences of black male students.

The purpose of this interview is to hear about your experiences which you can share that contributes to you progress (success?) in obtaining an undergraduate degree. There are no right or wrong answers, or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel.

If it's okay with you, I will be tape recording our conversation so I will be able to correctly record your remarks. I will provide you with a copy of the transcript of our conversation and if you like, you may provide any edits. If you agree to this recording, please say "yes" aloud. If not, please say "no," and I will stop recording.

Your identity will remain confidential and everything you say will be shared anonymously by a pseudonym. To ensure the privacy of your identity, please state the name you would like to go by in this interview and in any research that comes from this interview. (Allow them to state their name, repeat it if necessary.)

Participation is a voluntary and you may stop the interview at any time. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself, and what makes you a non-traditional student?
2. What was your primary reason for deciding to attend college?
3. Tell me about the things you are involved in on campus.
4. How has being a Black male impacted your experience at Mid Western University?
5. Describe the student support services you use at the college?
6. What factors have kept you enrolled in this institution?
7. Are there aspects of being a nontraditional student that presents barriers in your efforts to persist?
8. Tell me about a time you struggled academically, and how you got through it?
9. Can you provide a specific example of how your experiences studying at the university has influenced your success?
10. Where don't you feel comfortable or accepted?
11. What information would you share with other Black nontraditional males entering this university to help them overcome barriers and achieve academically?
12. Do you have any suggestions on how to better serve non-traditional students or for supports that you would have like to have?
13. Is anything else they would like to add?

APPENDIX E

CONSENT TO AUDIOTAPING AND TRANSCRIPTION

Consent Form For: Obtaining Gold: Experiences of Nontraditional Black Male Students at a PWI.

This study involves the audiotaping of your interview with the researcher.

Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audiotape or the transcript. You will be asked to give a pseudonym, which is the only one that will be used. Only the researcher will be able to listen to the tapes. The audio will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study.

Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or picture) will be used in presentations or written products resulting from the study.

Immediately following the interview, you will be allowed to have the audio erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to taping or participating in this study.

By signing this form, you are consenting to:

- having your interview audio-taped;
- to having the tape transcribed;
- letting the researcher use the written transcript in presentations and written products.

By checking the box in front of each item, you are consenting to participate in that procedure.

This consent for taping is effective until seven years from today's date which will be _____ . On or before that date, the tapes will be destroyed.

Participant's Signature

Date _____

APPENDIX F

THOUGHTS & REFLECTIONS

As I voyaged on the path of researching the success of nontraditional Black male students, it led me back to an early component of my research and my “Why?” We are more than what others may say we are; seeing is Believing! Growing up, I never considered my own personal experiences as successful; yes, my accomplishments in sports made others view me as a success, but outside of that...success or successful...no.

There were certain things which I did because that was the norm. I did what I was supposed to do. Go to school, learn something, get a job, and provide for my family. Education is power, but systemic powers do not always allow for your educational attainment to actualize into something more or greater. Racial stereotypes of early Americans had a significant role in shaping attitudes toward Blacks during, prior to, and even following the Civil Rights era. Images such as Sambo, Jim Crow, the Savage, and Black Brute may not be as powerful today, yet they are still alive. Modern-day thoughts associated with Black men as crack addicts, drug dealers, criminals, deadbeats (fathers), lazy, hypersexual, and athletes persist. Media continues to depict Black men as more aggressive and sociable, but less intelligent and achievement-oriented than other races. On TV, we (Black males) are shown as constantly under arrest, living in slums, on welfare, and in need of help from the community. Additionally, the focus on our athleticism encourages a dismissal of academic achievement in Black communities. When all you see and hear repeatedly are reports of this nature, after a while, you believe and set your path on that trajectory; it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, which is pushed through other imposed prophecies. Despite what it may look like on the

outside, I believed. There is a need to change this dominant narrative about Black males... and fast.

While researching this notion of success and non-traditionalism, I concluded that the experience of success for Black males had to be a unique experience for this population. Being “Black” in our society seems to be the worst thing ever. Why is this? I revisited this awareness often and spent numerous hours discussing my thoughts with colleagues and friends. My main thought was how a group of people who have experienced years of devaluation could have the same experience with this phenomenon of success as non-Black students. At this point, I began to explore my own experiences more deeply as a Black male student. This became my basis for examining this success phenomenon while sharing voice and changing the persistent narrative.

I embarked on this journey with some heuristic partners: 2727, Ali, Axel Foley, Bob Patrick, Blue Waters, Charles St. John, Hubert Perry, John, Josh, Michael, Michael Williams, Omar Williams, Sunny, and Island Man. Although being a university administrator, Black male, and previous nontraditional student myself, they helped me to see things through a much clearer lens more than I ever believed. I understood their lived experiences as a nontraditional Black male students at the university of today; while tackling this phenomenon of being a successful nontraditional Black male student, they see their identity as a blessing. I understood that even in my adult life, my success will impact how I connect with people, concepts, training, etc. Success is not a one-size-fits-all concept; instead, it is a way of life. It is a perceptive and existing component to all facets of our lives entrenched in the relationships we develop, the environments in which we interact, the programs that support us, and our personal alignments to success. Through this research and the heuristic nature, I

saw the highs and lows and the highlights and horizons of not only my life, the participant's lives, but more importantly, in the lives of Black males I work with each day as a university administrator. Their definitions of success influenced and clarified my own definition of success.

As I wrestled with how I voiced the participants' experiences, I understood that they impact others as they understand their lived experiences. I also saw clearly that Black males are not monolithic. To make needed changes on college campuses, we need to combat stereotypes by being aware of all the differences that exist among our students and by honoring those differences. Through this research effort, I realized that my success has not concluded...it is a living component of who I am. I have succeeded and am continuing to succeed, just like the Black males in my study....and with this knowledge, I have the responsibility to help awaken the "dormant success" within the many Black males across campus now and to come...and to assist campuses to enact policies and programs that will do the same. Now is the Time!

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VITA

Roland Hemmings, Jr. was born in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. He was educated in the public schools system of Trinidad & Tobago. He graduated from South East Port of Spain Government Secondary in 1997.

He began his college education at Missouri Valley College in Marshall, Missouri (MVC), from which he completed two semesters of college. In Spring of 2003 Mr. Hemmings transferred to the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) with a Track and Field scholarship, where he graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Criminal Justice and Criminology in 2005. After working with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Kansas City as a sports directors and program director, he decided to pursue the field of higher education and accepted a position as an administrative assistant at the Swinney Recreation Center on the UMKC campus. He began a Master's program in Education at UMKC in 2012.

Since that time he worked as the Student Union Building Operations Manager and currently serves as the Assistant Director for the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs. He began work toward his Ed.D. at University of Missouri-Kansas City in the Fall of 2014. Upon completion of his degree requirements, Mr. Hemmings plans to continue his career in higher education and to pursue research interests.