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BLACK MALE COLLEGIANS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT SUCCESS AT HISTORICALLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

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BLACK MALE COLLEGIANS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT SUCCESS AT HISTORICALLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mother…
I dedicate this work to my father…
I dedicate this work to my partner and best friend…
I dedicate this work to my children …
I dedicate this work to my twin brother…
I dedicate this work to my big brother and youngest sister…
I dedicate this work to my family, friends, fraternity, and sister sorority…
I dedicate this work to my ancestors…
I dedicate this work to my elders…
I dedicate this work to the dreamers, disruptors, and co-conspirators…
Most of all I dedicate this work to the FUTURE…

Do you wanna, do you wanna be
Do you wanna, do you wanna be
Do you wanna, do you wanna be, free
Do you wanna, do you wanna be, happy
Do you wanna, do you wanna be, happy
Do you wanna be, happy
Do you wanna, do you wanna be, happy
I said do you wanna, do you wanna be, happy
I said do you wanna, do you wanna be, free
I said do you wanna, do you wanna be happy
I said do you wanna, do you wanna be, free
Free from pain, free from scars
Free to sang, free from bars
Free my dawgs, you're free to go
Block is hot, the streets is cold
Free to love, to each his own
Free from bills, free from pills
You roll the loud, the speakers blow
Life get hard, you ease your soul
It cleanse your mind, learn to fly
Then reach the stars, you take the time
And look behind and said, "Look where I came
Look how far I done came"
They say that dreams come true
And when they do, that that's a beautiful thing
Do you wanna, do you wanna be happy?
I said do you wanna, do you wanna be free
I said do you wanna, do you wanna be
-J.Cole

Acknowledgements

"For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.
-Audre Lorde

My God: Psalm 46:1 says God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble and James 2:26 says for as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead. I thank Jesus for his grace and mercy for without my faith in Jesus, where would I be…

My Family: My wife, Tiffani Chalon Bates. This process would not be possible without your support. I say THANK YOU!!!

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Abstract

This study explored how Black male collegians define success during their college enrollment. Over the last 20 years, a robust amount of literature has been devoted to the topic of Black male students in higher education, most of it advancing a "deficit narrative" – that is, focusing on the "deficits" that cause Black males to "fail" in higher education (Harper, 2014). However, a relatively small amount of literature addresses how Black males' experiences are related to conceptions of collegiate success. Definitions of "success" vary by institution, but regardless of definition, most institutions neglect to include Black male collegians in defining, creating, or collaborating in the development of collegiate conceptions of success. This study investigated the ways in which Black males conceive student success. Their ideas have the potential to nuance institutional assumptions and/or expand institutional frames of student success. This study uses "counter-storytelling," a methodology outlined by critical race theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), to disrupt the dominant "deficit" discourse and provide a voice of agency for Black male collegians when defining student success. By understanding Black males' conceptions of success, institutions can (re-) evaluate strategies that contribute to the overall success of Black male collegians and potentially all college students.

Chapter 1. Introduction to the Research

When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.

Alexander Den Heijer

Introduction

My colleague said to me, "I don't know why Black men are not successful at HWIs; look at you; you made it…." I was not sure how to address my colleague, but at the time, I had a tremendous amount of respect for him. I am sure his intentions were good, but I honestly did not feel like I had succeeded at my college, a historically white institution (HWI). I posed the question to him, "Define 'succeed' or 'being successful at a HWI.'" My colleague said, "well, you know… what *you* are, educated, you have two degrees, a career, you're a good citizen. I mean, the goal of the University is that you walk out of here with a degree, and you have done that, so I would say that you have succeeded at making it. Plus we have offices to assist students of color and the university has made the commitment for students to achieve. Hell! You have the Multicultural office, student support services, and other areas in student affairs to give you all the assistance you need to make it if you want to." I thought about the age-old claim, "if someone really wants to make it, they can," which does not bother me as much as the assumption that if African Americans do fail, it's because they are lazy. My colleague was convinced that he was right about African Americans' ability to succeed at HWIs because he knew what, and where, I came from. He was certain that the challenges I had faced further supported the notion that African Americans can succeed at a HWI, but that some choose not to. It's tough to have those conversations with people who have no clue about being in an disadvantaged situation. I knew that being silent would only make me a

contributor to the common notion that success manifests itself in measureable ways and accrues to those who frame success very narrowly. As a doctoral student, I learned that the ways universities measure success do not account for, and cannot recognize, the fullness of Black male talent (Hotchkins & Dancy II, 2015).

Black[1] male college students face significant challenges at historically white[2] institutions[3] (HWIs). Some of those challenges include being excluded from or expected to "fit in" in an environment that views Black males as threatening, less intelligent than other groups, and in college only for athletic purposes (Fries-Britt, 1997; Gibbs, 1988; Harper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008, 2009). When Black male collegians debunk these negative stereotypes, they risk being seen by their peers as being passive, "acting white," or being a "sellout" (Ogbu, 2004). Black male collegians are faced with defending themselves against stereotypes of being more threatening, and are viewed as property rather than humans by institutions of higher education (Clotfelter, 2011; Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen, 1995). Athletic departments, specifically revenue-generating programs, continue to benefit greatly from sports that are played predominantly by Black males, who not only carry most of the brand recognition for the program but also carry the most physical load and receive little and unequal compensation (Clotfelter, 2011). Black males are viewed as less intelligent, and when they do excel in academic work,

[1]Please note that I will use the terms "African American" and "Black" interchangeably and that the terms "Black" and "Blacks" are used to refer to the diaspora of Africans and African Americans. Additionally, please note that white ideology views people with "Black" skin complexion as one monolithic race, regardless of ethnic origin.

[2] As an emerging critical scholar, I intentionally de-capitalize the word "white" as I deconstruct the dominant discourse that erases "Black" and Blackness and privileges "white" and white spaces.

[3] The use of the term "historically white institutions" serves as a political and historical reminder that these institutions originally did not allow women or and people of color to enroll. The PWI moniker is used only in quotation from other authors. However, the author of this dissertation uses HWI as a way to support the race binary supported by American colleges and universities.

they are likely to be seen as "the exception to the rule" or to be "accused unfairly of cheating or plagiarism because the quality of [their] work far exceeds the expectations of a professor" (Strayhorn, 2008b, p. 377). Even when Black males engage in sports, the narrative that "student-athletes of color are in college only to play and not to learn" creates a perception of them that is monolithic; they are simply bodies that work rather than learners and future professionals (Harper, Williams Jr, & Blackman, 2013). These stereotypes are barriers to Black collegians' academic success, and they create false narratives about Black males in higher education. Due to these negative associations, Black male collegians experience a greater burden of stress and mental exhaustion than their white peers (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011).

Campus microaggressions lead Black males to feel unwanted, rejected, and isolated. Microaggressions "are subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations and putdowns, often kinetic but capable of being verbal and/or kinetic" (Pierce, 1995, p. 281). Black males perceive HWIs as hostile, unwelcoming environments where they do not develop a sense of belonging (Benton, 2001; Strayhorn, 2008b). Students of color have difficulty trusting faculty and administrative staff, so they under-report instances of racism and unfairness (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004). The lack of diversity in faculty and staff, combined with Black students' lack of confidence in the administration's responses to injustice, not only creates a hostile climate but also increases mental stress on students (Allen, 1992; Benton, 2001). One form of mental stress is internalized racism. In a study conducted by Dancy (2014), the author refers to W.E.B. Dubois's rhetorical question: "how does it feel to be the problem?" (p. 42). At HWIs, students of color absorb the message "You are the problem" and internalize the

feeling that they are a burden. The results have damaging effects, including imposter syndrome[4] (Brookfield, 2005; Dancy, 2014), depression, anxiety, the need to "prove them wrong" (Bonner, 2010), and John Henryism[5] (Smith, 2004, 2010; Smith et al., 2011).

Black men have lower rates of student success compared to white males at HWIs. In fact, a recent study by Museus and Jayakumar (2012) reports that 63% of white students obtain a degree, compared to just 43% of their Black, Latino, and Native American peers. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), another recent study reports similar results: 73% of white students but only 51% of Black students were found to persist in attaining a degree (Ross et al., 2012). Even more discouraging is a report by Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn (2012) on six-year graduation rates for full-time degree-seeking students at four-year public colleges and universities. According to this report, Black men have the lowest rate, 32%, compared to white males, whose rates are 50.8% to 56%. Only Native American men (in some year cohorts) have lower graduation rates than Black men (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014). At most institutions, student success is measured quantitatively using retention rates, persistence rates, and degree attainment (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). Although "student success" is not defined consistently across institutions, retention rates, persistence rates, and degree attainment are the major success metrics at most higher education institutions (Hagedorn, 2005). Scholars and practitioners

[4] "Research and scholarship offers the following signs of impostor syndrome: a) feeling like a fake, or the belief that ones does not deserve his or her success or professional position and that somehow others have been deceived into thinking otherwise; b) attributing success to luck or to other external reasons and not to one's own internal abilities; and c) discounting success, or the tendency to downplay or disregard achievement of success" (Dancy, 2014, p. 44).

[5] "The concept is named after the legendary African American steel driver, John Henry, who died from a blood vessel that burst in his brain after successfully competing against a steam-powered steel driving machine" (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011a, p. 66).

continue to raise concerns, especially given the gaps between degree attainment rates for Black men compared to their white counterparts (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Given what we know about HWIs and the increasing enrollment of people of color, critical scholars question whether HWIs are equipped to support Black men's academic success (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

The literature on student success is vast. Nontraditional definitions of student success include qualitative measures such as students' sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012), social integration (Tinto, 2012), and sense of identity**.** However, the literature almost completely fails to address Black male students' conceptions of academic success. For Harper's (2012) report, *Black Male Student Success in Higher Education*, 219 high-achieving Black male college students were interviewed about their academic success. Significantly, most of them stated that this interview was the first time they had been asked about how they had "successfully navigated . . . higher education" (Harper, 2012, p. 15). This study is telling, particularly regarding the ways that institutions of higher education overlook Black men's conceptions of success and fail to include them in institutional conversations about how to support their academic achievement. In light of this, the proposed research study aims to open a dialogue that allows Black male collegians to add their perspectives to definitions of student success.

This study will investigate the how Black male students define student success. Specifically, it will explore the experiences of Black male collegians that inform their conceptions of student success and, more importantly, how Black males define student success at HWIs. Black male college students' definitions of success may be very similar to or very different from their colleges' and universities' definitions of success. If

colleges and universities hope to close the success gap and decrease the marginalization of Black male collegians on campus, Black male students must be a part of the conversation about student success. An understanding of Black males' definitions and perceptions of student success has the potential to inform institutional efforts to close the student success gap and decrease the marginalization of Black male collegians. Additionally, this study has the potential to suggest ways to increase student success, as measured both traditionally and nontraditionally, for Black men and other marginalized students in higher education.

The dearth of information on student success regarding specific diverse populations has prompted the need for this study. Although a considerable amount of literature has been devoted to student success in general (Tinto, 2012; Astin, 1991; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarella, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005), very little research addresses success among diverse student populations. Likewise, despite the growing literature on Black men in higher education,[6] little research investigates Black men's definitions of student success. As mentioned earlier, Black men are less likely than white students to receive a degree. But Black men's contributions to definitions of student success, including their narratives about how their college experiences inform their conceptions of student success, can potentially lead to policy changes and institutional climate changes that support retention and degree attainment. Although access to higher education has increased in the last 20 years among diverse populations, degree completion has not increased by the same

[6] Most of the literature reflects Black males' behaviors, rather than institutions' unproductive practices; this points to the need for a more intentional effort to research what institutional practices may affects Black male collegians success outcomes.

amount (Tinto, 2012). One reason for this is that institutions of higher education have opened their doors to students from diverse populations without seriously considering their cultures and perceptions – a situation that sets them up for failure rather than success. Thus, despite good intentions, institutions of higher education frequently have been negligent in supporting success for students from underrepresented groups (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012).

Background of the Problem

Institutions of higher education continue to measure success in traditional ways. As a result, institutions frame success very narrowly, ignoring alternative conceptions of success. When institutions reward, recognize, or give preference to a particular kind of success, they devalue other ways that students can be successful. Moreover, institutions continue to invest in definitions of success that are measurable, which means that more money and resources are funneled both to dominant, majority populations, and also to dominant conceptions of success, primarily graduation and retention initiatives. This is problematic for diverse student populations and Black males, because the institutions place the responsibility on the student to adapt to the dominant conception of success. Students who do not "fit" the dominant narrative of the HWI environment are thus disadvantaged, and the institution typically does not invest in other ways that these students may achieve success.

Research suggests that higher education institutions are failing Black male collegians when they define success through traditional measures such as degree attainment, GPA, and similar metrics. Black male collegians' completion rates are lowest among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in U.S. higher education (Harper, 2006a;

Strayhorn, 2010). “According to national data, two-thirds of Black men who start college never finish” (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014, p. 20). Graduation rates have gradually increased over time, particularly for Asians and whites, who experienced graduation rate increases of 7.7% and 5.2%, respectively, between 1996 and 2004 (Palmer et al., 2014). For Black men, however, the increase during this time period was much lower, at 2.4% (Palmer et al., 2014).

College access for Black male collegians, particularly those attending HWIs, has increased over the past 30 years, but they still have limited access to selective and elite colleges and universities (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). Another concern is that when Black male collegians do gain access to elite institutions, they do not graduate at equitable rates. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) succeeded at increasing access to higher education (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004; Dancy & Brown, 2008), but institutions have failed to acknowledge that different backgrounds, different experiences, and different social and cultural capital affect students’ ability to succeed (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Astin’s student involvement theory (1985), Tinto’s model of student departure (1993), and Chickering’s work on student development (1987) have resulted in a body of literature regarding student success and experiences, but their studies were often focused on white males and limited in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and non-traditional status.

Bensimon (2007) writes:

> If our goal is to do scholarship that makes a difference in the lives of students whom higher education has been least successful in educating (e.g., racially marginalized groups and the poor), we have to expand the scholarship on student

success and take into account the influence of practitioners—positively and negatively (p. 445).

How are HWIs' operating definitions of student success different from Black male collegians' definitions? Brower & Ketterhagen (2004) asked a question in an article about the mismatch between Black and white student expectations of success in college. The results revealed that Black students work harder at HWIs than white students do at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The study additionally reports on Black students' coping methods at HWIs. According to Brower & Ketterhagen (2004), "research findings have been consistent when describing how Black students at PWIs cope with their feelings of social isolation, discrimination, aggression, and/or general dissatisfaction by adopting a sense of "belonging-within-alienation" (p. 98). This means that Black students at HWIs developed their own social networks that operate within, but mostly separately from, the white students' social networks. Brower and Ketterhagen did not address which groups are most successful in college, but rather how students are encouraged to succeed in college. The study reports that Black students work harder to succeed at HWIs "as if they were relearning the rules of the institution" (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004, p. 110). The ideologies and methodologies of this success go underexplored in the research.

Harper (2012) published a report that shifted the focus from failure to success, asking how Black males are succeeding rather than why they are failing. In this study, it was discovered that high-achieving Black males were no different from low-performing Black males in their conceptions of academic success. The participants said they "attribute academic success to high expectations, an influential teacher, access to a

college preparatory program, a peer mentor who shared the secrets of success, or life-changing opportunities to travel or establish meaningful relationships with college educated adults who possessed tremendous social capital" (Harper, 2012, p. 14). Still, questions remain about how Black males define success. Although it is known that HWIs rely heavily on degree attainment as a way to measure student success, it appears that Black males are achieving success in building relationships with faculty and peer mentors, developing identity awareness, and learning stress coping skills, despite racial tensions, unequal resources, and hostile environments. This should inform what institutions know about degree attainment pathways and post-college flourishing (Allen, 1992; Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004; Harper, 2012). However, in the literature, degree attainment, GPA, and retention are the main ways that PWIs document or measure student success. Kuh (2006) writes:

> Among the more commonly incorporated elements are quantifiable student attainment indicators, such as enrollment in postsecondary education, grades, persistence to the sophomore year, length of time to degree, and graduation (Venezi et al., 2005). Many consider degree attainment to be the definitive measure of student success (p. 5).

Kuh acknowledges that other traditional, quantitative ways of measuring student success are sometimes used, including GRE scores, enrollment and completion rates, and college entry examination scores (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). But these traditional ways of measuring student success limit the scope of student success and fail to take into account nontraditional, qualitative ways of measuring student success. Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006) note "the need for institutions to be

more inclusive of a much more diverse student population. Indeed, greater attention to diversity—race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age—has led to more nuanced, alternative understandings of student success" (p. 6). It is therefore problematic that HWIs do not consider other student success metrics or place value on Black men's definitions of student success. Additionally, HWIs have not been successful in providing effective ways to close the success gaps among different populations (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006) report similar findings about effective approaches to closing such gaps, concluding that further research is needed to find effective ways for diverse populations to be successful at HWIs, specifically first-generation students, low-income students, and students of color.

Practitioners, policy-makers, and administrators must be careful not to reinforce a system that ignores students' own perceptions of student success. Failure to collaborate with students in defining success may lead to policies and procedures that are unsupportive of Black male collegians. This also silences them and ultimately marginalizes them, both within the conversation and within institutions themselves.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore a) how Black collegian males define success, b) how their college experiences inform these definitions, and c) whether Black male collegians perceive that their institutions value their definitions of success and incorporate them into policies and programs. Additionally, this study will explore the socialization process of success, particularly how, as men, they frame success in patriarchal ways that may mirror their institutions' views of student success. Abundant research has addressed success among white male college students of traditional age

(Astin, 1984; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1997; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Feldman, 2005; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991). Such studies all have reached some conclusion about what policies and programs are effective in promoting student success. However, the literature lacks research about how to implement effective success strategies for diverse populations. In other words, scholars have documented what a student success environment looks like, but they have failed to ask various diverse student populations, including Black men, to describe their perceptions of student success. Yet for many institutions, improving academic success among diverse student populations is stated as a central goal. It is therefore vital to investigate how Black male collegians define success.

Significance of the Study

It is important for students to feel supported by their institutions (Strayhorn, 2012). One way to achieve this is to ask Black male undergraduates about their thoughts and perceptions on matters that involve them. When Black male students feel valued, accepted, and supported, they are more likely to persist and obtain a degree (Harper, 2014; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). This is known as sense of belonging, which Strayhorn (2012) defines as "perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). If they address college student experiences and examine how Black males in college define success, institutions will demonstrate that they acknowledge Black men's perceptions, value their voices in

higher education, and welcome their contributions to the policies that directly affect them.

This study, which will investigate how Black males define success, is important for several reasons. Equity for diverse student populations in higher education (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012) is and has been a significant concern for practitioners and policy-makers (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). The concerns include, but are not limited to, racial inequality, affirmative action/admission, and the cost of college. Given the increasing numbers of diverse student populations at HWIs, it is clearly necessary to close the race and gender gaps in student success and provide equal opportunity (Strayhorn, 2009). Another reason, and perhaps the most important, is the disparity in degree attainment between whites and students of color, which leads to economic and social divisions in society (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, Whitmore, Miller, & others, 2006; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Black male collegians' graduation rates are not comparable to those of their white counterparts, and institutions must acknowledge such disparities. Much of the literature, however, points to students' behaviors and attitudes and fails to address institutions' roles (Quaye & Harper, 2014).

Finding ways to advance student success has gained increasing attention from policy makers, administrators, and scholars (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). In fact, closing the gap in student success has both immediate and future implications for issues ranging from "voting, health, unemployment, poverty, rates of incarceration and school readiness of children, to rates of volunteerism" (Tinto, 2012, p. 2). Museus and Jayakumar (2012) and other scholars have echoed these same concerns: "the disparities in success also constitute an ongoing

concern and urgent problem that requires the attention of higher education researchers, policymakers, and practitioners" (Allen, Jayakumar, & Franke, 2009 p. 3; Kelly, 2005; Museus, Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2011). Harper (2014) and other prominent Black scholars have advanced the conversation about college success by pointing out that Black males are not homogeneous, so we must consider the intersections among Black males; masculinities; other men of color, such as Latinos, Native Americans, Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI); and high-achieving Black males (Dancy, 2012; Ford & Harris, 1996; Harris & Harper, 2014; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014; Strayhorn, 2008a, 2009). Black scholars are asking Black male students about their perceptions regarding success, identity, and their experiences navigating HWIs. But HWIs themselves are not considering Black male students' perceptions of success. This study aims to discover Black male collegians' definitions of student success and potentially to inform HWIs about other ways to conceptualize student success, specifically for Black males. This in turn may challenge universities to expand their own understandings of higher education's purposes.

While seeking to gain valuable information about Black male collegians' perceptions of success, I must acknowledge the attention Black males receive in the academy. Several scholars have repositioned the narrative that revolves around the question "what is wrong with Black males?" Society, along with the constant reinforcement of media, has framed Black males as violent, disruptive, dangerous, and lazy. Sadly, these perceptions follow Black males to higher education. Dr. Shaun Harper has contributed a tremendous amount of work toward changing higher education's typical perceptions of Black males and providing vital research showing that Black males are not

monolithic. Along with other prominent scholars (such as Dr. T. E. Dancy, Dr. Terrell Strayhorn, and Dr. Frank Harris III), this approach has shifted the national conversation about Black males in higher education from "What is wrong with Black males?" to "What does success look like for Black males?" Harper (2014) intentionally questioned negative narratives that position Black males in higher education as being at a disadvantage. Traditionally, these questions are framed around educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and Black male student attrition.

In addition, a focus on Black males often works to represent Black males as the "default" Black students and thereby to obscure what is known about Black women in higher education. The importance of studying Black male success should not come at the expense of acknowledging Black female collegians; indeed, while this study intentionally studies Black male collegians, I must acknowledge that not investigating perceptions of success among Black female collegians could contribute to the representation of Black males as more important than Black females. It is my intention to address this concern using an intersectional approach to explore the ways in which Black male perceptions of success oppress Black women. Additionally, as a scholar, I recognize that both Black males and Black females should have equal importance in higher education. Black males and Black females may face different challenges in higher education, but both deserve study, research, and solutions.

This study aims to contribute to the higher education environment in the following ways: (a) support institutions in providing agency for Black collegian males; (b) hold higher education institutions accountable for environments that are unsupportive

of Black males' degree completion; (c) center Black male voices about their experiences at HWIs, both positive and/or negative; and (d) provide recommendations for potential reconceptualizations of student success.

Research Questions

This study explores Black male collegians' definitions of success and their perceptions about how, if at all, their institutions acknowledge their definitions and incorporate them into the institutions' own success definitions and metrics. In this effort, I will consider the ways in which various background contexts socialize Black male perceptions of student success. The dominant narratives about Black males in higher education are overwhelmingly negative, so it is important to counter such narratives using counter-stories. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define counter-storytelling as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told…also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (p. 22). Counter-storytelling is an essential component of critical race theory (CRT) (Matsuda, 1995). Counter-storytelling provides a voice of agency that goes against the dominant narrative (Hunn, Guy, & Manglitz, 2006). I have chosen this method because it specifically provides agency for marginalized groups, who often are silenced by systematic oppressive structures. Using the counter-storytelling method enables me to analyze Black men's experiences and make explicit their perceptions of student success. More importantly, this method makes it possible to investigate how Black males' definitions and perceptions compare with the definitions of student success promulgated by higher education institutions, specifically the university they attend. By listening to their counter-stories, we also can learn what shapes their definitions, thereby developing

a fuller understanding of how their experiences influence the definitions of success that motivate them in college.

The research questions driving this study are**:**

1. How do Black male collegians conceptualize success?
2. What experiences socialize Black men to their definitions of success?
3. How do these students perceive institutional conceptions of success?

Conclusion

Low rates of student success for Black males at HWIs continue to raise concerns in higher education, particularly the gaps between degree attainment for Black males compared to their white counterparts (Museus and Jayakumar, 2012). According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), in 2004, Black males' graduation rate was 32.7%, whereas the graduation rate for white males was 56%. "Black men had the lowest graduation rates [among all groups] in 1996, 2001, 2003, and 2004" (R. T. Palmer et al., 2014, p. 22). Black male collegians are recruited to attend HWIs to succeed; yet for Black men, HWIs' environments often prove to be harsh, unwelcoming, and hostile, making it difficult for them to navigate and succeed.

In this chapter, I have reviewed traditional measures of student success, such as graduation rates and retention rates, and argued that these measures shape certain negative perceptions of Black male collegians. Graduation rates are particularly low for Black men. Viewing success narrowly through such measures reinforces the dominant "deficit narrative" – the common belief that Black men are less successful in college because of some educational deficit on their part. Additionally, I have presented the

potential implications that could result from conceiving of success differently – specifically, in ways informed by Black male students' perspectives. I have also argued that Black male collegians' conceptions of student success should be considered when institutions develop and refine their definitions of student success. As more students of color gain access to schools other than HBCUs, it is necessary for HWIs to create environments that fully engage and involve Black male collegians at all levels, including in the definition of success. Institutions should support a wide range of success factors, from academic achievement to a sense of belonging, and factors informed by Black men's perceptions of success should not be exempt. If institutions do not accept responsibility for expanding their success metrics, they perpetuate the systemic oppression of certain populations, including Black male collegians.

This study not only questions who gets to define success, but also explores how Black male collegians define student success and what experiences shape their definitions of student success. Additionally, this study asks whether Black male collegians believe that their definitions of success are congruent with their institutions' definitions. In the following chapter, I will analyze student success using theoretical frameworks such as critical race theory, intersectionality, and Prakash and Waks's four conceptions of excellence. These frameworks will provide both historical and contemporary contexts for Black male collegians' conceptions of student success. These frameworks also will inform an examination of intersectional issues faced by Black male students at HWIs. Data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews in which Black male collegians tell their stories. The results may have implications for how HWIs can foster a more welcoming environment, leading to higher rates of student success.

Chapter 2. Review of the Literature

The purpose of this literature review is to provide research-based background regarding Black males' experiences at HWIs. First, I will briefly review the history of Black people's access to higher education in the United States. The historical context sheds light on the systematic structures of injustice that continue to affect student success, retention, engagement, and degree attainment. This history also undergirds contemporary practices used to justify certain policies, procedures, and programs that affect today's campus climate at HWIs. Next, I will provide the contemporary context, highlighting the construction of student success ideology in higher education and the challenges that Black male collegians face today. Given the historical and contemporary issues of educational injustice with regard to Black people, my reason for addressing the challenges of Black male collegians is not to extend the deficit narrative but rather to focus attention on universities' failure to create effective environments in which Black male collegians can succeed.

History of Black Access to U.S. Higher Education

Until the 1840s, the U.S. education system was highly localized and available only to wealthy people (Thattai, 2001). Black people first arrived in the colonies in 1619 as enslaved people (Anderson, 1988). By the middle of the nineteenth century, 4.5 million Black people lived in this country. Thattai (2001) elaborated:

> The earliest education given to them was by the missionaries to convert them to Christianity. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts established many schools. The southern states opposed the education of blacks because these states were still favoring slavery. In spite of individual efforts, the

> education of blacks remained very low until Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. The literacy rate that was around 5% in the 1860s rose to 40% in 1890 and by 1910 it was at 70%. (p. 5)

Although literacy improved for Black people during this time period, education for Black students remained far inferior to the education that white students received**.** Educational resources were allocated inequitably, leading to inferior educational opportunities for Black students. Black teachers had to work with fewer books, inferior buildings, and less funding, while while white teachers were paid more and worked fewer hours (Bowen & Bok, 1998).

Neither physical space nor metaphorical space was properly created for Black people following the Civil War, so Black people had to create alternative spaces, including educational spaces, in order to survive. This situation is not unique to Black people in the United States; it can be seen throughout history, woven into practices, polices, culture, beliefs, religion, education, and every way of life, whenever a culture has considered one group of people to be "less than" another (Freire, 2000). Even before Black enslavement ended, "Blacks began establishing small private schools between 1860 and 1862" (Anderson, 1988 p. 9) in the south. These schools, which were taught by Black teachers, provided education through the high school level.

It is important to study Black people's experiences in higher education, because, historically, their voices have not been heard, and the call for them to be heard is no less important today than in the past. We must acknowledge that many of the current issues facing Black men and women in higher education result from a long history of injustice. Even the briefest glance at the history of Black people in education, and more specifically

in higher education, shows that this history has been marked by struggle. This historical struggle contributes to the nearly endless issues that affect Black males in higher education today, such as access (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997), academic achievement (Davis, 1994; Wright, 2009), and campus climate (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008). These are just a few of the challenges that hinder the upward mobility of Black male collegians. When Black males are faced with a hostile environment and a lack of knowledge regarding collegiate life, they often find themselves unable to finish their degree (Pike & Kuh, 2005; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007).

Student Success and Higher Education

The theme of student success is prevalent in many different areas of educational research. Scholars and practitioners such as Alexander Astin, George Kuh, Vincent Tinto, Shaun Harper, Sylvia Hurtado, Ernest Pascarella, Linda Sax, and Frances Stage (to name just a few) have contributed a vast body of literature regarding student success. In all areas of higher education, the student success literature is infused with terms like "involvement," "engagement," "integration," "sense of belonging," "retention," "persistence," and "resiliency," all of which attempt to capture student experiences to explain student success. However, as these words often have been used interchangeably, it is vital to address a few differences among them in providing context for this study**.** According to Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie (2009), "Established theories and constructs long associated with student success, including involvement, engagement, and integration, provide common language and a body of knowledge to inform understanding

of the challenges" (p. 407). The origins of these terms contextualize the study, which informs our findings about how better to serve diverse student populations.

Astin (1993) defined student involvement as "being characterized chiefly by two concepts: the amount of physical energy students exert and the amount of psychological energy they put into their experience" (Foubert & Grainger, 2006 p. 168). One study focuses on the effect of involvement in clubs and organizations on the psychosocial development of first-year and senior college students. This was a four-year longitudinal study using a survey instrument based on Chickering's theory. All participants were college students of traditional age (18–22), 40% of whom were men and 60% of whom were women (Foubert & Grainger, 2006).

The results showed that students who were involved in campus activities had achived greater development than those who were not involved at all in campus activities (Foubert & Grainger, 2006). This result is based on sophomores who had experienced their first year in college. This study supports Astin's results, finding, for instance, that "there appears to be a strong connection between involvement in student organization and higher levels of development on several indicators" (Foubert & Grainger, 2006, p. 175). This study has led to theories and models such as the Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model, involvement theory, and Tinto's theory of student departure.

The Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model was developed by Astin (1993) as a guiding framework for assessments in higher education. The premise of this model is that educational assessments are not complete unless the evaluation includes information on student inputs, the educational environment, and student outcomes (Astin 1993). Tinto's theory of student departure supports Astin's involvement theory, but rather than

focusing on the amount of time spent, Tinto's theory "emphasize(s) the need to understand learning and the impact of involvement on persistence" (Milem & Berger, 1997, p. 387). Later, Tinto's model would be revisited in more detail about campus environment and its important role in students' social integration, which affects persistence (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Milem & Berger, 1997).

Degree attainment, although not the only way to measure or define student success, provides a relatively simple quantitative snapshot for universities. Higher education institutions are highly motivated to have their students graduate, not only because this indicates student success but also because high levels of degree attainment can help universities increase their funding and improve their reputations and rankings (Kuh et al., 2006).

The national conversation about education funding has received a great deal of attention in recent years, especially because state funding continues to decrease as a proportion of state universities' operating budgets (Burke, 2002). Burke (2002) reports:

> The funding crisis which is so common in higher education systems is due to two primary factors: mass higher education, and the labor intensive character of higher education. These two factors, accented by a backlog of capital needed for the upkeep of — and new investments in — infrastructure, are responsible for rising costs in higher education. Furthermore, state appropriations are declining, at least in relative terms, because of competing commitments ... It is not surprising, then, that increasing costs and falling revenues are generating a discussion on new forms of funding higher education. (p. 16-17).

As a result, higher education institutions face the challenge of providing public education while offsetting the cost to maintain the university. Some state governments have implemented performance-based funding that ties public universities' funding levels to the university's persistence rate, graduation rate, or other "outcomes indicators" (Burke, 2003). Performance-based funding has created greater impetus for universities to increase their graduation and persistence rates, but it has also placed greater pressure on them to secure additional funding from non-state sources.

As noted by Kuh (2006), some of the less complicated ways to measure student success are "standardized college entry exams, college grades, and credit hours earned in consecutive terms, which represent progress toward the degree" (p. 5). As public funding decreases as a percentage of universities' overall operating budgets, universities must figure out creative ways to offset costs. As many state agencies have created funding incentives based on student success, public education has responded by placing even higher priority on student success. To put it bluntly, universities have a huge stake in increasing the proportion of students who receive degrees – not just to attain the lofty goal of a well-informed citizenry, but also to meet the requirements of state governments' performance-based funding schemes. Although this study does not look specifically at how such incentives affect degree completion, it is worth bearing in mind that incentive systems motivate universities to provide every possible opportunity and resource to help every student earn a degree.

A significant amount of literature addresses the challenges that Black male collegians face in higher education. Likewise, a large body of literature focuses on the effect of student behaviors on success outcomes (Quaye & Harper, 2014). However, the

literature contains gaps; questions remain about student success among diverse student populations. Black male collegians need research about what works for them in predominantly white spaces. Moreover, almost no research places responsibility on the institutions themselves. Most of the literature focuses on student behaviors and outcomes rather than on institutions' actions, policies, programs, and cultures (Quaye & Harper, 2014). Similarly, very little research has involved Black males in defining their own success in higher education. Instead, the research narrative consistently tells the story of what is "wrong" with Black men in higher education. Regardless of researchers' good intentions, only a handful of scholars have taken the time to ask Black male collegians themselves about what they think may be the reason that Black males in higher education are less likely than white students to graduate. Many scholars continue to advance the literature surrounding Black male experiences in higher education in ways that do not frame Black males as the "problem" (including Cuyjet, 1997, 2006; Dancy, 2014a, 2014b, 2012; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Kimbrough, 2003, 2005; Harper, 2006, 2007, 2009a, 2012; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009; Palmer & Young, 2009; Strayhorn 2008a, 2009, 2012; Harper & Wood, 2015; Wood, 2011; Wood & Turner, 2010; Wood & Williams, 2013). However, research is still being conducted that (intentionally or unintentionally) frames Black males as the problem. This is still the dominant narrative in higher education, despite the efforts of the aforementioned scholars. Through a white, patriarchal, capitalist lens, without the participation of marginalized voices, the literature documents how institutions make policies, implement procedures, and develop programs intended to ameliorate marginalized groups' "deficits."

Black Males and College Engagement/Disengagement

Historically, the collegiate environment has silenced the students most in need of help (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yasso, 2000; Harper, 2009). The prevailing narrative of most college campuses is that if students need help, they will seek it out or ask for it. Yet most institutions do not consider the fact that having to seek help from someone who does not look like you, or with whom you cannot readily identify, often serves as a barrier. Thus, it is a mistake for institutions to assume that Black male students will seek help from a white face when they need assistance. In fact, seeking out a face different from your own can be unproductive and displeasing (Loo & Rolison, 1986).

Some institutions have allowed Black cultural centers to assist with students of color transitioning to college. As a result, many Black college students, with the help of Black student centers, devise coping skills that allow them to function in the HWI academic environment (Stewart, 2011). These skills, coupled with the centers' social support, help Black students adjust to the campus climate (Fleming, 1984). In a study of 11 Black students, male and female, at an HWI, participants explain that Black cultural centers are critical spaces "where they can engage in educational purposeful activities, such as studying, interacting with peers, and holding meetings" (Palmer et al., 2014, p. 69). When Black male collegians engage in student organizations that promote social justice and Black identity expression, they are more likely to develop a sense of belonging (Dancy, 2014; Palmer et al., 2014). Furthermore, studies report that faculty-staff interaction enhances the student's relationship to the HWI and increases academic development, social integration, and activism (Astin, 1984; Palmer et al., 2014; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1997).

Studies have also reported higher levels of retention of Black males when increased faculty-student interaction occurs (Gregerman et al., 1998; Palmer et al., 2014; Tinto, 2012). Additionally, peer interaction leads to greater academic and personal development (Hu & Kuh, 2003). Student organizations, particularly Black Greek-letter fraternities (BGLFs), also are associated with an increased sense of belonging for Black male collegians, despite the negative national attention regarding hazing practices in fraternities. Black male initiatives (BMIs) continue to provide college campuses with resources to increase Black male campus engagement (Bledsoe & Rome, 2006; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper & Harris, 2012; Palmer, Maramba, & Dancy, 2013; Wood & Palmer, 2012). BMIs are catalysts for many engagement practices and often consult existing research and theory in creating spaces for Black males (Palmer et al., 2014).

Gaps remain in the literature about Black male success and engagement. In addition to the factors that contribute to Black male success, a 2014 report titled "Black Male Collegians: Increasing Access, Retention, and Persistence in Higher Education" mentions financial support, spirituality, family support, non-cognitive factors, racial identity, and masculine identity as engagement factors for Black male collegians.

Financial supports are huge contributing factors that influence Black males' college success. If fact, family socioeconomic status is strongly and positively associated with participation in post-secondary education (Corazzini, Dugan, & Grabowski, 1972; Kuh et al., 2006). In addition to financial support from a student's family, federal financial aid is a factor, albeit a highly nuanced one, due to the fact that loans have both positive and negative effects on Black males' educational attainment. Furthermore, it should be noted that students with criminal records are ineligible for federal aid.

Moreover, little research has been conducted on the topic of students of color who have criminal records; such students' experiences are not well understood and are often overlooked in the conversation about student success.

Spirituality is another factor that contributes to Black male collegians' success. In fact, research shows that Black males who say they have a spiritual relationship with God (Mattis, 2000) or a purpose in life (Love & Talbot, 2000) have higher retention rates, particularly at HWIs (Weddle-West, Hagan, & Norwood, 2013). However, the literature on spirituality does not address non-traditional spiritual beliefs, such as those of Black males who identify as atheist,[7] agnostic,[8] or humanist.[9] Because spirituality is often used as coping mechanism for Black males at HWIs (Weddle-West et al., 2013), further research should address the specific institutional practices related to this. Additionally, research is needed on the differences among Black males who do and do not have spiritual beliefs.

Family support is another indicator for Black male collegian success (Palmer et al., 2014). Tinto's theory of student departure asserts that students should divorce from high school, leaving their friends, families, and social interactions behind as they integrate into college. But this theory does not apply to all students in the same way: for students of color, family support is associated with higher rates persistence (Milem & Berger, 1997; Palmer et al., 2014). Families play a vital role for students of color as they adjust to HWIs, providing an emotional outlet and decreasing stress levels (Barnett, 2004; Palmer et al., 2014). On the other hand, family relationships also can have a detrimental

[7] Atheism is a disbelief or lack of belief in the existence of God or gods (Goodman & Mueller, 2009)
[8] An agnostic is one who believes it impossible to know anything about God or about the creation of the universe and refrains from commitment to any religious doctrine. (Goodman & Mueller, 2009).
[9] Humanism is an attitude to the world centered on human experience, thought, and hopes (Strossen, 1986).

impact on Black male students' success. A study conducted by Guiffrida (2004) reports that 15 of 99 Black students who permanently left the university felt emotional strain rather emotional support from their families, and that this situation led to low academic performance. However, it is problematic to frame families as the problem for Black male students who struggle academically, because insufficient research has been conducted to investigate the intersections of race and class among families who send their children to HWIs.

Non-cognitive factors also affect Black male students' success. Such factors include persistence, determination, and motivation, or what is sometimes termed "grit"; all of these factors are associated with Black male collegians' success at PWIs (Palmer et al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2013). However, further research is needed to determine whether these non-cognitive factors also play role in Black male collegians' success at HBCUs. Racial identity is another non-cognitive factor that has been linked to Black male collegian success. In fact, a study conducted by Nasim, Roberts, Harrell, and Young (2005) showed that racial identity and academic success were positively correlated. Other research has identified a correlation between positive racial identity and feeling connected to campus (Mitchell & Dell, 1992; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). Feeling connected to campus, commonly referred to as "sense of belonging," has gained much attention in in the recent literature. In a book titled *College Students' Sense of Belonging,* Strayhorn (2012) reports the results of several studies showing a connection between Black males' sense of belonging and their motivation "for academic and social behaviors" (p. 83). In summary, Palmer et al., (2014) concluded:

> Clearly more research is needed to better understand the relationship between racial identity and academic achievement. However, given that some research has found a link between racial identity and sense of belonging, practitioners should consider holding workshops, forums, and other programmatic initiatives to help Black men (particularly at PWIs) enhance their sense of racial identity, which might positively impact their sense of belonging. (p. 82)

Some literature has explored the role of masculinity and gender identity in Black male collegians (Dancy, 2012; Harper; Patton, 2011a; Harris III et al, 2011). Identity development is vital to student success, and a critical analysis of how Black males are gendered has provided insights that inform institutions' efforts to support these students' success (Brown II, Davis, & McClendon, 1999; Dancy, 2012; Harper, 2012; Harris III et al., 2011; Palmer et al., 2014; Patton, 2011a; Palmer & Struve, 2011). Black males continue to reinforce ideas of masculinity that are problematic, but investigating their conceptions of masculinity provides information about how masculinity and Black male success are connected (Dancy, 2012). Additionally, more research is needed regarding the extent to which Black males' success is constructed around a hegemonic capitalist perspective, which creates a dominant narrative regarding the definition of success and reinforces institutions' ideology of success as well.

It is vital that the study of these factors continue, as campus climates for Black male collegians and other diverse student populations still foster inequality: Black males continue to feel alienated, silenced, exploited, invalidated, and mostly misunderstood at HWIs. The climate can prove very challenging for Black students, especially Black males, who are frequently "described using disparaging terms such as *dangerous*,

endangered, *ineducable*, and *lazy* . . . . This problem is exacerbated by the fact that some Black males internalize such beliefs, which, in turn, become self-fulfilling, self-defeating, and self-threatening" (Strayhorn, 2009 pp. 711-12). A hostile racial climate contributes to the increased negative perception of Black males and causes emotional discomfort, especially when institutions have few Black male faculty, staff, or administrators in whom Black male students can confide. Additionally, Black males are less likely to engaged in hostile environments and when Black males do engaged, it is often done at the price of assimilation and/or Black males engage in internalize oppression of their own skin which result into anti-blackness (Harper, 2007).

Black Males and Persistence

The literature emphasizes the importance of early childhood education, family support, and supportive college environments for the persistence of Black males in college. Persistence in higher education refers to "the decision to remain in or to withdraw from higher education" (Munro, 1981, p. 135). Wilson (2007) reports that

> success in college begins long before students ever enroll. In fact, a student's performance in the higher education arena is intricately linked to his or her ability to develop the skills necessary to compete and meet the demands of college before they arrive. (p. 129)

This conclusion has been consistent for more than 30 years; in 1981, Munro found that "high school academic performance was a better predictor of college academic performance than was measured aptitude" (p. 139).

Family financial support is another key contributor to persistence and degree attainment. African Americans who received financial aid were advantaged compared to

their peers who did not receive aid (Kuh et al., 2006; St. John, 1991). In addressing Black students' lower persistence rates, one study concluded that "student aid is much more important in promoting financial access for minority students because of their higher levels of financial need" (St. John, Hu, Simmons, Carter, & Weber, 2004, p. 211). In other words, minority students' persistence is correlated with access to financial aid. Several studies have reached the same conclusion: financial aid contributes to student persistence (St. John, Hu, &Weber, 2001; Carroll, 1987; Kaltenbaugh, St. John, & Starkey, 1999). Educational attainment for people of color is a particularly important issue in the new education financing environment, which is characterized by fewer direct grants and greater reliance on loans (Baker & Velez, 1996; Carter & Wilson, 1996; Orfield, 1992). Additionally, numerous studies suggest that students of color are competitively disadvantaged in access to higher education, choice of colleges, and degree completion in U.S. postsecondary education (Baker & Velez, 1996; Carter, 1999; Carter & Wilson, 1996; Castle, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The literature indicates that Black college students face myriad challenges before college, and then once they get to college, additional challenges make it difficult to persist and attain a degree.

Theoretical Frameworks

I use three theoretical frameworks, described below (and summarized in Table 2.1), to analyze Black males' perceptions of student success and examine how those perceptions may or may not be considered in institutional policies, procedures, programs, and campus climate. Considering the history of exclusion in American higher education, I find it most appropriate to use a critical lens to disrupt the dominant discourse about Black men. Higher education spaces have been challenging for marginalized populations,

and a critique that addresses the institutions rather than student behaviors serves as the impetus for this study.

Critical race theory	■ Centrality of race and racism ■ Challenge to dominant ideology ■ Commitment to social justice ■ Centrality of experiential knowledge ■ Transdisciplinary perspective
Intersectionality	■ Accurate reflection of diversity in higher education ■ Excavation of voices and realities at the margins ■ Greater understanding of converging identities
Four conceptions of excellence	■ Mental proficiency ■ Disciplinary initiation ■ Self-actualization ■ Social responsibility

Table 2.1 Overview of the three theoretical frameworks used in this study: Critical race theory, intersectionality, and four conceptions of excellence.

Critical Race Theory

I use critical race theory (CRT) to question the extent to which HWIs take diverse populations' (especially Black males') perceptions into account in defining student success. This lens on HWIs requires an analysis of historical and current systemic practices of institutional racism that impede progress for diverse student populations. It also provides context for the prevalent "deficit narrative" in the research literature on Black male collegians. CRT intentionally points out the ways in which racism is made to seem "ordinary" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012); in other words, the traits and practices considered to belong to the dominant group become seen as "normal," which pushes non-dominant structures to the margins. CRT is a key foundation for this exploration of Black males' perceptions and for interrogating institutional culture. This framework not only exposes racism as a component of society but also reveals and critiques the racist

structures in higher education that are reinforced through social thought and consciousness.

CRT draws from and extends a broad literature base in law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, education, and women's studies (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Mari Matsuda (1991) views CRT as

> the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination. (p. 1331)

It is important to note that, in gathering Black men's perspectives, this study challenges the dominant discourse that Black men are monolithic (Hilton et al., 2012, Howard, 2013, Garibaldi, 1992). CRT addresses the roles of race and racism in education and works at the intersections of race, class, and gender (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In this research, I draw on the work of other CRT scholars with similar purposes. This framework functions in my study to provide "basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25). CRT scholars address the dominant positions that race and power have in education (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Tierney, 1993). Using CRT, Daniel Solórzano and Tarra Yosso take a critical approach to their research on campus racial climate. Similarly, the CRT model allows me to look through a critical lens to pose questions about equity in education.

The "basic CRT model consists of five elements focusing on: (a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the trans-disciplinary perspective (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 22). From this framework, we can intentionally focus on the intersections of race, class, and gender while simultaneously addressing traditional paradigms (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000), such as classroom settings, administrative factors, institutional climate, and student success measures for Black males at HWIs. This framework addresses the historical context that affects how racism influences and shapes the structures of higher education today. Given what we know about how racism affects educational success for Black people, and more specifically for Black males, it is important to address the systemic issues that have plagued and marginalized this group. In this study, CRT promotes the counter-narrative of Black males in higher education and uncovers Black male collegians' narratives about success. CRT allows the researcher disrupt and dismantle biases to gain more insightful knowledge about Black male collegians. In this way, the study gives power to those who have systematically been absent from the narrative. CRT also provides motivation for this study – answering the vital question "why does this matter?"

Because CRT deals with racism in terms of power, it is important to clarify what "racism" means for the purposes of this study. Solórzano & Yosso (2000) use a variety of definitions for "race," but I will focus on Marable's (1992) usage of the word "racism." Marable defined racism as "a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians and

other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color" (p. 5). We can see how, over time, the effects of racism have played a key role in Black students' experiences in higher education, specifically Black male students' experiences. Thus, it is important to provide a context showing how racism, discrimination, and systematic oppression reflect Black males' college experiences, while also exploring their coping strategies. One aim of this study is to shed light on the possible connections between these coping strategies and Black male collegians' definitions of student success.

Intersectionality

In her work on intersectionality, Crenshaw (1991) stated that "the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intra-group differences" (p. 1241). Since Crenshaw's revolutionary contribution to intersectionality, scholars have argued that individuals have many identities, and that focusing on only one identity leads to a failure to understand how the person's multiple identities interact in ways that affect their experiences (Museus & Griffin, 2011). Intersectionality can be defined as the "relationships among multiple social dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). Understanding how these multiple identities intersect therefore provides a more holistic understanding of individuals and their experiences (Museus & Griffin, 2011). Intentionally for this study, I will use intersectionality to provide a framework that analyzes on a micro level to reveal the intersections of multiple identities and on a macro level to investigate structural and political systems. "Structural intersectionality" refers to how multiple social systems interact to shape individuals' experiences, especially their experiences of oppression

(Crenshaw, 1991). In higher education, an example of structural intersectionality is the shaping of Black male experiences at HWIs through the combination of sexual orientation and racial inequalities (Crenshaw, 1991; Museus & Griffin, 2011). "Political intersectionality" refers to "how the multiple social groups to which an individual belongs pursue different political agendas, which can function to silence the voices of those who are at the intersection of those social groups" (Museus & Griffin, 2011, p. 7). For example, political intersectionality is at play when Black males refuse to address discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students of color to avoid having these issues made public and "risking tainting the image of those communities of color" (Museus & Griffin, 2011, p. 7).

In the context of this study, using an intersectional framework[10] will provide a theoretical analysis leading to a better understanding of the experiences of students of color in general and Black males in particular. Museus and Griffin (2011) consider intersectionality important in research because it

1. Accurately reflects the diversity in higher education
2. Facilitates the excavation of voices and realities at the margins
3. Promotes a greater understanding of how converging identities contribute to inequality
4. Avoids simultaneous advancement and perpetuation of inequality

Because Black males' experiences are the focus of this study, it vital for this research to start from the premise that Black males are not monolithic; they hold multiple identities, and these identities can illuminate how they perceive success at HWIs. I also

[10] The terms "intersectionality research," "intersectionality framework," and "intersectional analysis" are used interchangeably.

draw on intersectionality to analyze the multiple identities that Black males simultaneously occupy, from being marginalized by race to being privileged by gender. In exploring Black male collegians' conceptions of success, it is important that I acknowledge their contradictory status: They are participants in a system (the HWI) that perpetuates racist oppression, but they are also affected by internalized racism, particularly by the prevalent negative messages about their own ability to succeed at HWIs**.** Using this framework will allow me to explore how Black men's definitions of success may be connected to patriarchal, homophobic, and sexist notions of Black manhood. Because Black males occupy multiple identity spaces, it is important to recognize that their participation in patriarchy may influence their conceptions of success and to acknowledge the reality that their lives and experiences are valued in some situations and among some groups, even while they are silenced in other situations and among other groups. I consider the historical and contemporary implications of U.S. higher education as a racist, heteronormative, hegemonic, and patriarchal system in which Black male collegians are participants by force (racism) and by implicit and complicit behaviors (patriarchy). By using an intersectional framework, my research creates spaces for participants to intentionally disrupt the dominant discourse. This in turn allows Black male collegians to (re-) frame how universities define success for them.

Considering the focus on Black males for this study, I use the intersectional framework for several reasons. First, I draw on intersectionality to analyze both the advantaged and the disadvantaged spaces that Black males occupy in defining success. For example, the national discourse about Black males cultivates the notion that they are in a state of "crisis," but this discourse fails to acknowledge the role of socialization or

the intersections of race, gender, and class. Likewise, the prevalent research narrative on the topic of Black male collegiate performance often lacks a broader context that acknowledges the role of socialization and intersectional issues. Considering the broader context, as this study does, will enrich the research narrative and counteract the common, but harmful, view of Black males' experiences and perceptions as monolithic**.** To discover how Black males define success, I intentionally reflect on intersectional factors. Second, I use structural intersectionality to analyze how Black male college students reinforce a system of patriarchy that benefits them, particularly in ways that prescribe how Black males are expected to perform. Third, I draw on political intersectionality scholarship to consider the ways that Black males are taught to think about success and excellence and to frame these ideas in hegemonic, capitalistic, patriarchal ways. Even while being oppressed, Black males are not exempt from reinforcing a system of oppression. The socialization of Black males may not only create extreme internalized racism but also encourage sexist, misogynistic ways of thinking. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Black males in this study may define success in ways that are oppressive to other marginalized identities, including Black male non-collegians. Finally, the intersectional framework provides me with the tools to analyze Black males' multiple identities and, in particular, to demonstrate that their experiences and perspectives are not monolithic.

Four Conceptions of Excellence

For the purposes of this study, this framework allows one to draw a comparison between how institutions validate certain forms of success and invalidate others forms of success. In April of 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued an

influential report on the state of U.S. education, rather urgently titled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.* The report addressed the questions "what is excellence?" and "how does mediocrity affect academic performance?" In response, Prakash and Waks published "Four Conceptions of Excellence" in hopes of deepening and clarifying public discourse about the aims of American education (Prakash & Waks, 1985).

Prakash and Waks (1985) define the four conceptions as "the technical, the rational, the personal, and the social" and describe the standards of educational excellence associated with each (p. 79); these are operationalized (respectively) as mental proficiency, disciplinary initiation, self-actualization, and social responsibility. According to this hierarchical framework, mental proficiency is conceived as the lowest level standard, with each subsequent standard building on the one that precedes it (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

- Mental proficiency is measureable and traditionally quantifiable; it is observable in classrooms, activities, and learning outcomes. At this level, "Knowledge is viewed as the possession in memory of information" (Prakash & Waks, 1985, p. 81), and the education curriculum is highly influenced by the need to assess. In their success metrics, institutions of higher education rely heavily on this concept in their use of GPAs, tests, evaluations, and graduation rates.
- Disciplinary initiation is shaped by view of knowledge and understanding as inherently social or inter-subjective, as taking place in institutional contexts in which individuals contribute to an ongoing evolution of ideas

and standards. Disciplinary initiation occurs as a result of problem solving, but it also requires creative, higher-order imaginative abilities where "learners must invent the rules for the interesting and important problems" that enable them to easily move through increasingly intricate conceptual schema (Prakash & Waks, 1985, p. 83). This level moves beyond problem-solving and memory recall and refers to the process by which a learner starts to become an expert in a particular field of knowledge.

- Self-actualization emphasizes self-awareness and personal growth. Self-actualization requires an individual to "shape the development of his or her unique mind, and integrate mental and other powers in the pursuit of cognitive and other personal ends to actualize himself of herself" for the purpose of securing authenticity and freedom from the constrictive binds of social conditioning (Prakash & Waks, 1985, p. 85).
- Social responsibility extends beyond the individual to the community; it places the satisfaction of individual ends in the context of the community of ends (Prakash & Waks, 1985, p. 87). "Social responsibility couples individual satisfaction with communal uplift as a function of achieving a just society where the common good is reached due to individuals actively working to solve significant problems" (Hotchkins & Dancy II, 2015, p. 77).

Conclusion

The literature provides a clear record of historical indifferences that result in an unequal playing field for Black male collegians. Collectively, Black males have

experienced disadvantages due to lack of access to higher education. But even after gaining access to college, Black male collegians do not graduate at expected rates, nor at rates comparable to those of their white counterparts (Strayhorn, 2009). Throughout the literature, the dominant discourse perpetrates and maintains a system of power for whites. The literature reveals certain factors that increase Black male retention and sense of belonging. When Black male collegians have meaningful faculty-student connections, peer interactions, and mentoring, they are more likely to be retained and to persist to graduation (Palmer et al., 2014). Other factors require further investigation, particularly non-cognitive factors such as perceptions of manhood and masculinities, racial identity development, spirituality, and family support.

These factors break down the structures that, if not intentionally addressed, often prevent Black males from achieving their desired goals. These structures silence the voices of marginalized populations, specifically Black male collegians. Although the literature acknowledges the historical and contemporary disparities at play in this situation, the voices of marginalized students are absent, both figuratively and literally, from the research narrative. As mentioned previously, the research provides institutional perspectives about what works for student success, but almost none of the literature places any responsibility on the colleges and universities, especially when students of color are not meeting institutional standards for success.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore Black male collegians' perceptions of student success at a historically white institution (HWI). Participating students shared their perceptions about student success and described the experiences that contributed to these perceptions. This chapter provides details regarding the research design, participants, instrumentation, data collection methods, and methods of analysis that used in the study.

Research Questions

To provide insight about the perspectives of Black men pursuing higher education, this study's research questions are as follows:

1. How do Black male collegians conceptualize success?
2. What experiences socialize Black men to their definitions of success?
3. How do these students perceive institutional conceptions of success?

Methodological Approach

Methodology is best described as a strategy that guides the actual research plan and "provides specific direction for procedures in a research design" (Creswell, 2013, p. 13). For the purposes of this study, I use a qualitative approach. The following definition, taken from Marshall and Rossman (2011), defines qualitative research methods: "Qualitative methods help find the natural solutions to problems – the solutions that people devise without policy intervention" (p. 2). Qualitative research is also "a broad approach to the study of social phenomena; its various genres are naturalistic and

interpretive, and they draw on multiple methods of inquiry" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 2). Qualitative research design empowers research participants to share their stories and provides more detailed descriptions of their lived experiences than quantitative methods, such as surveys yielding data that can be analyzed statistically (Creswell, 2007).

This study takes a critical approach to qualitative methods in order to attend to structural inequities and the lived experiences of these inequities. Critical race theory (CRT) not only offers a theoretical framework for understanding racism as it intersects with other social identities but also provides methods for both research and praxis that work to address race and racism in systems. CRT positions this study to challenge the dominant ideology of student success (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Institutional conceptions of student success have historically silenced certain populations, specifically those who are racially minoritized and lie outside the margins (Anderson, 1988). Using CRT as a theoretical framework disrupts the narrative of what is "normal" and "challenge[s] the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; [offers] a liberatory and transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and [focuses attention] on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24).

I use the counter-storytelling approach because it positions the participants as co-researchers and co-constructors of knowledge. Furthermore, this approach provides agency for voices that are typically unheard and marginalized (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-storytelling is an essential method of CRT (Matsuda, 1995). The purpose of this study is to gain insight from Black males' perceptions of student success. Counter-

storytelling not only gives voice to people of color, but also serves as a way to disrupt the dominant discourses (Hunn, Guy, & Manglitz, 2006). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define counter-storytelling as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (p. 26). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) describe three types of counter-stories and/or narratives. Personal stories or narratives "recount an individual's experiences with various forms of racism and sexism" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Other people's stories or narratives are told in the third person and "usually offer biographical analysis of the experiences of a person of color, again in relation to U.S. institutions and in a socio-historical context, [and] composite stories or narratives draw on various forms of 'data' to recount the racialized, sexualized, and classed experiences of people of color" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 33). Engaging in counter-storytelling allows me to critically analyze Black males' experiences and make explicit their perceptions of student success. Given that Black male collegians' experiences are rarely told through their own lens, this study is designed to allow their stories to be told and to disrupt the dominant discourse. White privilege is often expressed through dominant discourse, through the "bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant race bring to the discussion of race" (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, p. 462). Altering the dominant discourse through counter-storytelling thus gives Black male collegians the opportunity to challenge their institutions' conceptions of success.

De-Limitations

This study will shed light on Black male collegians' perspectives about success and will ask participants how their experiences help shape their definitions of success.

One limitation of this study, however, is that it will neither formally nor thoroughly investigate the institution's definitions of success; instead, it will address the institution's definitions of success mainly as they are perceived by the study participants. A formal and thorough examination of the institution's definitions of success is beyond the scope of this study for two reasons. First, the purpose of this study is to shed light on Black male collegians' perspectives, not the institution's. Second, undertaking an examination of the institution's definitions of success would require additional methods and a great deal of additional data gathering that would be impracticable and unwieldy. For instance, such a study would require the researcher to gain access to informants from the institution's high-level administration, board of regents, and key historical figures to provide insight on the institution's policies, climate, and context. Despite this limitation, however, this study will be able to shed light on perceptions of success among Black male collegians at HWIs from a theoretical framework (such as Prakash and Waks's (1985) four conceptions of success).

Researcher Positionality

I acknowledge my own preconceptions about this topic because I identify as a Black cisgender-performing man, and my undergraduate experiences are similar to some of the study participants' experiences. Acknowledging these assumptions and biases is known as reflexivity. Reflexivity occurs when a researcher is placed at the center of the data analysis and draws from a variety of biographical aspects (Mezirow, 1981). I am engaged in this study because my experiences led me to question what it means to be successful in college and whether these conceptions reflect the same definitions of success as those of the institution I attended. For example, a colleague said to me, "I

don't know why Black men are not successful at PWIs. Look at you; you made it." I'm sure his intentions were good, but I honestly did not feel like I have or had succeeded at a PWI. I posed the question to him, "Can you define 'succeed' or 'being successful at a PWI?'" My colleague replied, "Well, you know… what you are, educated, you have two degrees, a career, you're a good citizen. I mean, the goal of the University is that you walk out of here with a degree, and you have done that, so I would say that you are successful at a PWI."

When I walked across the stage receiving my diploma, I remember my family, friends, and fraternity brothers expressing their excitement for me. Yet after the pictures, hugs, kisses, fraternal songs, and verbal congratulations, I left that campus feeling unwanted, unprepared, and unsuccessful. I had my degree in hand, but I did not feel successful. At the time, I thought I was just overwhelmed with uncertainty about the future, which is common. Yet one master degree and three-fourths of a doctorate later, I am still asking what it means to be successful at an HWI.

I also acknowledge that my background and environment contribute to my definition of success, particularly in ways that create biases and assumptions in defining success in college. Some of those assumptions are reinforced by societal norms that create a false ideology of what success is. I acknowledge that my conceptions of success were based on the kinds of success associated with sports, money, and material possessions. As mentioned by Prakash and Waks, success in sports is measured in very quantifiable ways that often focus on the merit of winning rather than the development of the team or the player: for instance, the emphasis is on points scored, percentage of games or matches won, titles won, and individual trophies received. Likewise, "success"

in our society is often measured simplistically in material or financial terms: like "points scored" in team sports, we look at "money earned" or "possessions acquired" to decide who is most successful. Yet these conceptions are flawed, insofar as they cannot tell us whether someone actually *feels* successful. I brought these common but inaccurate conceptions of success to college. To my way of thinking at the time, college was a means to reach success, not a place to reconsider how I was socialized to think about success.

I bring with me to this study my own class history. I grew up in a family that was sometimes in poverty and sometimes part of the working poor class. I had the impression, somehow, that if I just had access to higher education, everything else would fall into place; if I was able to start college, I would automatically have access to everything college could offer, including not only academic resources and a degree but also intangible goods such as a sense of belonging, acceptance, engagement, and validation. If success in college reflects degree attainment, then my conceptions of success were flawed from the start, as I brought with me the assumption that simply reaching the doors of the university was a guarantee of success, equaling degree attainment itself. As a researcher, I must remain aware that some participants may have experiences and perceptions similar to mine, but also that some may not.

Engaging with participants who may have similar backgrounds must be done with complete transparency. Yet I must also acknowledge the complexities of engaging with participants whose identities are different from my own. My own personal biases should not be ignored; instead, as Van Maanen (1990) stated, "it is better to make explicit our understandings…to hold them deliberately at bay and even to turn this knowledge against

itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing character" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 47).

As a student affairs professional, my experiences play a significant role in this research. I work closely with college students outside the classroom. Working in housing allows me to interact with Black male collegians in non-academic settings, such as at programs hosted by Student Affairs. I must acknowledge that my position of authority and my title as a student affairs administrator may affect participants' responses. I therefore must be careful of not "eating the other," a phrase hooks (1992) uses to describe "behaving in-authentically and manipulating or even controlling participants" (p. 21). As a Black, male, cisgender student affairs professional, I am aware the some of my identities, such as cisgender and professional, are empowered to "eat the other" – that is, to prevent the full expression of my own and my participants' other identities. My own quest for the truth should not be at the expense of my participants.

My identity provides me with qualitative research challenges. Although I may be able to create an authentic and trusting space for some Black males, I also must acknowledge that my identity may challenge others (Jones et al., 2013). In addition, I must intentionally acknowledge participants' intersectional identities and pay attention to how Black males are socialized to conceptions of manhood and masculinity. These conceptions influence Black male collegians' perceptions of success (Dancy, 2012; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). As a researcher, I must be able to see Black males as both "victims and victimizers" and must ensure, transparently, that my privilege does not go unchecked (Dancy, 2012). Considering my position, my identities, and the social context in which I study participants, I must understand the complexities in identity research that

often go unchecked in qualitative work (Dancy, 2012). In doing so, I draw from T. Elon Dancy's (2012) recommendations for undoing homogeneity in qualitative research (Dancy, 2012). These recommendations provide a critical methodological checklist that helps the researcher check personal bias and assumptions that could potentially affect the participants' trust and the research outcomes.

1. *Identify subject positions and locations.* Researchers must see themselves clearly, acknowledging their authentic identities. Additionally, researchers should locate the roles they inhabit and take note of ways in which these empower and/or disenfranchise.
2. *Push paradigmatic knowledge and methodological flexibility.* As mentioned above, Black male collegians must be seen as both "victims and victimizers." In other words, it is vital to understand the peculiar dualistic socialization of Black males in being oppressed and also serving as the oppressor.
3. *Intersect qualitative methodologies in research about identity intersections to maximize data analysis.* Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of the behavioral context.
4. *Keep close to the data in the analysis.* Researchers should code closely to the raw data to fully capture participant truths. Layering coding or line-by-line coding combs the data closely, requiring each line of data to receive a code (Charmaz, 2006).

5. *Auditors and peer debriefers are critical.* Peer debriefers may challenge all aspects of the research design, including conceptual and theoretical frames, institutional site selections, participant selection, and methodology. Auditors review the data, methodology, and analytical documents for consistency and applicability, and offer feedback, suggestions, and confirmations.
6. *Re-envision the pilot study.* This allows the data collection protocol to be tested before the actual study is conducted, which gives the researcher experience working with people of various identities and thus reduces the amount of identity-related anxiety encountered during the study.

It is important to unpack my own lived experiences and to acknowledge my assumptions and biases. Dancy's (2012) checklist provides important and explicit ways to check assumptions, which enables me to build a better relationship of trust with participants.

Establishing rapport is a key element in gaining trust, and one way to build rapport when using counter-storytelling is to research a population with whom one identifies. In my interactions with participants, I intentionally relayed my personal experiences and displayed my vulnerability (Jones et al., 2013). I know from my own experience that I feel a greater sense of trust in someone who lets me see their vulnerability. For example, as an undergraduate, I once had an instructor who was doing research and writing. When I visited with her and learned that she was worried about the quality of her writing and frequently visited the writing center, I came to see her less as

an authority figure and more as a human being who had academic concerns similar to mine. This resulted in a greater sense of trust.

Similarly, by engaging in open and honest discussion about my background (growing up Black, male, and economically disadvantaged) and my values and biases, I hope to foster trust among my participants, even if some of my values and biases are rooted in oppressing identities that participants might hold. According to Glesne (1999), "rapport describes the character of effective field relationships" (p. 95). In qualitative research, rapport is a "distance reducing, anxiety quieting, trust-building mechanism that primarily serves the interest of the researcher" (p. 95). Good rapport generally yields more in-depth information that increases the likelihood of authenticity (Jones et al., 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Triangulation

According to the *Sage Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry*, triangulation is "a procedure used to establish the fact that the criterion of validity [has] been met" (Thomas A. Schwandt, 2007, p. 297). This process ensures the integrity of the study and provides validation. Several qualitative researchers address the need to remain credible and plausible, including Jones, Torres, & Arminio (2006), who note that credibility has to do with "whether the researcher's judgment is reasonable given the nature of the topic and the circumstances." (p. 130). For the purposes of triangulation, I use several data techniques to help ensure the study's credibility. Jones, Torres and Arminio (2013) discuss systematic approaches to address the researcher's role or biases. "Self-reflections, reflections with other researchers, participants and theoretical framework are all evidence of reflexivity in a study's written form" (p. 125). These approaches counteract researcher

bias and increase the trustworthiness of the study. After the interviews were transcribed, I met with participants again to make sure that their perceptions of student success were conveyed. This process is known as member checking, and it serves to increase trustworthiness within the research and promote congruency (Jones et al., 2013). Using member checking "provides participants with the opportunity to react to the findings and interpretations that emerged as result of [their] participation" (Jones et al., 2013, p. 99). Additionally, to counteract my own biases, I engaged in reflective weekly journaling during the entire process and subjected my journal to peer review by my critical cohort group – fellow doctoral students who are knowledgeable about qualitative research techniques – to ensure that my biases did not lead me to misinterpret participants' perceptions. It is important to make sure that, as a researcher, I do not reshape or alter how the interviewees define student success.

Considering the theoretical and methodological approach of this study, using a critical approach is consistent with CRT methodology. CRT allows meaning to emerge from the data, and as a researcher, using a reflective journal reveals my biases and thus helps me analyze the data in ways that minimize or eliminate my biases' effects. Lincoln & Guba (1985) referred to reflective journaling as a human instrument and a guide for decision-making regarding the congruency of the research study. In sharing my journal with my cohort, I engaged in the technique known as peer debriefing: "Peer debriefing is making arrangements with knowledgeable and available colleagues to get reactions to data collection" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 221). However, I maintained participants' anonymity and confidentiality by using pseudonyms, as ethical concerns are of paramount importance when the researcher is so intimately involved in the project.

Research cannot be completely free of errors and biases, as each technique has limitations, but by triangulating the techniques of member checking, reflective journaling, and peer-debriefing, I maximized the study's trustworthiness, congruency, and continuity.

Site Selection

My reasoning for selecting the Midwest research institution was motivated by access to participants as well as the institution's complicated historical and contemporary relationships with race and racism. This institution is a doctoral degree-granting research university serving the educational, cultural, economic, and health-care needs of the state, region, and nation. It is the state flagship university, with an enrollment of about 27,000 students. I will refer to this institution pseudonymously as Marvel University. According to institutional reporting (Factbook, 2014), Black men constitute fewer than 5% of male students, compared to white men, who make up 59% of male students. This institution is historically a white male institution that excluded (white) women until the nineteenth century and people of color until the 1940s. This is not uncommon; until the 1840s, the higher education system in the United States was highly localized and available only to white males who were wealthy. The first Black people arrived enslaved to the North American colonies in 1619. By the middle of the nineteenth century, there were 4.5 million Black people in the United States. According to Bowen and Bok (1998), "the education they received was markedly inferior in quality. African American children in the South went to predominantly black schools, in which (on average) pupil-teacher ratios were one-quarter greater than those in White schools, school terms were 10 percent shorter, and black teachers were paid half the salary of white teachers" (p. 31). Against

this backdrop, in 1948, a Black student applied and was denied access; this would be the first time that a Black male student was documented to have applied. Two years later, a Supreme Court case involving the Black student was decided in favor of his enrollment and ruled that educating him in separate facilities was a violation of his Constitutional rights. Given the ruling of the Supreme Court, Marvel University was forced to admit the Black student and, despite access to the university, his ability to be successful did not reflect that of his peers. Before the United States Supreme Court case reversed a lower court decision, this student was forced to sit outside the classroom or in a separate area away from other students and was treated as less than human while trying to pursue his doctorate degree in the college of education.

Author Zora Neale Hurston once said, "If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it" (Hurston). The historical denial of access for Black students to higher education is problematic, to be sure, but so is the lack of equity even today in the proportion of Black students who attend colleges and universities. According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, African Americans constituted 13.9% of all U.S. college students in 2014, but at Marvel University, they accounted for just 8.9% of students.

Almost 70 years after the first Black student was admitted, Marvel University finds itself an institution that promotes inclusivity and diversity, yet some Black male collegians still have experiences similar to the first Black student. Today, some students still encounter alienation, constant surveillance, and micro- and macro-aggressions (Harper, 2009; Smith, 2010; Strayhorn, 2012). In March 2015, these tensions came to the fore when a video appeared on social media showing members of the historically white

fraternity Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) singing a song that encouraged the exclusion of Black students with the phrase "There will never be a nigger SAE" and even celebrated the idea of lynching Black students: "You can hang them from a tree, but they'll never sign with me." This video, which quickly was shared and seen by people all over the world, became a reminder of the violent past as well as a confirmation of the current issues that continue to marginalize Black students. The emergence of this video underlined the reality that, since its beginnings, U.S. higher education has systemically disregarded and excluded Black males. In response to the video, a strong activist outcry emerged among several student groups, calling for more diverse voices to be heard by the university's administrators.

This study examines not only Black male collegians' perceptions of success but also the experiences that help shape their ideas of success at a historically white institution. With today's campus climate, marked both by continuing micro- and macro-aggressions against Black students and a nascent spirit of activism, Marvel University currently is a particularly suitable site for this study, which aims to center Black male collegians' stories and to decenter dominant narratives.

Sampling

Participants were recruited through student organization email lists, emails to colleagues who work with student organizations, and social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, GroupMe, and Instagram. Additionally, participants were recruited through alumni groups, particularly the university's Black Alumni Association. The sampling criteria are central to the study's effectiveness in examining Black male collegians' perceptions of success. As I came into contact with potential participants, I

issued a demographic survey (shown in Appendix A) to ensure that I recruited participants who met the study criteria. Participants are Black males who are currently enrolled full-time or part-time as undergraduates or graduates students, or who have attended or graduated from Marvel University within the last five years. The purpose of interviewing participants who have already graduated is to compare and contrast conceptions of success with degree attainment. This also provides a range of perceptions of success from students at different points in their academic careers. I included a range of enrollment statuses (full-time or part-time; attended or graduated) because the literature shows that Black males are more likely than the average student to stop attending college and less likely to graduate (Kuh et al., 2006; Palmer et al., 2014). Including those who have stopped attending allowed me to gather information about such students' perceptions about their departure from the university as well as their perceptions of success. Moreover, the demographic survey ensured that I recruited participants with a variety of socioeconomic statuses and levels of engagement and involvement.

It is important that I define what engagement means in this study. In the field of higher education, engagement typically is defined as "the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success" (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009, p. 412). However, for this study, it is vital for the participants themselves to decide whether they are engaged on campus. This means that the definition of "engaged" may vary from participant to participant, but this also provides greater insight regarding what they think about the university. This is why the study recruited Black males with a wide variety of

experiences, regardless of their classification or whether they have completed a degree.

I used purposeful sampling to increase the pool of potential recruits from the desired target population. Purposeful sampling involves "identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest" (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 534). To increase the recruitment of Black males who met the criteria, I emailed students, colleagues, and departments who directly interact with Black males. Students interested in participating filled out the demographic questionnaire (shown in Appendix A) to provide additional information. As required, participants were made aware of the project's IRB approval. It was also made clear that all participation was completely voluntary and that participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any time during the interview process and for the duration of the project.

Data Collection

For the purposes of this study, I will investigate Black males' perceptions of student success at an HWI by using a semi-structured interview approach, which can produce rich data while also allowing time for participants to process their thoughts and experiences and to gain clarification (McMillan, 2004). I asked open-ended questions intended to elicit insight about Black males' perceptions of student success. The interview protocol was designed to provide Black males with the space to "be themselves" despite being in a setting (the HWI) where they may experience marginalization or alienation. As a researcher, I understand the limitations that this may present, so I followed an outline for writing successful interview protocols and conducting interviews. *The Qualitative Report 2012* (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012) provides

14 tips for writing interview questions. In addition to intentionally framing interview questions around Black males' experiences and using a peer-reviewed guide for writing interview questions, I also adapted questions from Rolland's (2011) dissertation *African American Male Students' Perceptions of Factors that Contribute to their Academic Success* and Dancy's (2012) *The Brother Code: Manhood and Masculinity among African American Males in College.* I presented about a dozen open-ended questions (shown in Appendix B) that explored and elicited insight regarding Black males' perceptions of student success. According to Patton (1982), "The truly open-ended question does not presuppose which dimensions of feeling, analysis, or thought will be salient for the interviewee" (p. 170). This allows interviewees to move freely in the conversation without feeling constrained or coerced.

Data Analysis

My goal in data analysis is to capture as much as possible the full perspectives and meanings that Black male students give to student success. In qualitative research designs, the researcher prepares and organizes the data for analysis (Creswell, 2007), a process that provides "order, structure and interpretation" for collected data (Marshall & Rossman 2011, p. 207). As a result, it is common, and normal, for the researcher to feel that the data are too disorganized or messy (Marshall & Rossman, 2007). Analyzing data from a qualitative perspective gives structure to theories and themes, allowing the researcher to make general statements from the collected data (Strauss & Corbin, 1997).

In some cases, qualitative researchers have bundled analysis into three distinct activities: description, analysis, and interpretation. Wolcott (1994) explains these activities as follows:

> By no means do I suggest that the three categories – description, analysis and interpretation – are mutually exclusive. Nor are the lines clearly drawn where description ends and analysis begins, or where analysis becomes interpretation… I do suggest that identifying and distinguishing among the three may serve a useful purpose, especially if the categories can be regarded as varying emphases that qualitative researchers employ to organize and present data. (p. 11)

Wolcott encourages the researcher to be intentional about the processes used for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, emphasizing the importance of being thorough.

I audio-recorded the interviews and had them transcribed by a professional transcriber who was instructed about the requirements for following IRB guidelines. To ensure confidentiality, I provided the transcriber with a pseudonym for each participant. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. Each interview's transcription then was shared with the interviewee to check for accuracy. Based on interviewee's input, some transcripts were altered. This technique is know as "member checking"; according to Marshall and Rossman (2011), this is "a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (p. 267). I engaged in member checking because, given the nature of this study, it was vital that participants' authenticity was transparent.

After the transcript was created, my next step was to code the data. According to Marshall & Rossman (2011), coding provides the researcher with the ability to generate categories and themes. Using a thematic coding process was important to ensure that the views and beliefs of the participants were adequately expressed. Thematic analysis as an

independent qualitative descriptive approach is described as "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). As a methodological analysis, thematic analysis identifies "recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts, characterizing particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question" (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 150). The three stages of thematic analysis, as described by King and Horrocks, were implemented in this research: (1) descriptive coding, (2) interpretative coding, and (3) definition of overarching themes. Additionally, I overlaid these three stages with the five "phases of thematic analysis" described by Braun and Clarke (2006) for the discipline of psychology, producing a hybrid model of thematic analysis outlined in Table 3.1.

Stages of analysis (from King & Horrocks, 2010)	**Phases of thematic analysis** (from Braun & Clarke, 2006)
1. Descriptive coding	1a. Familiarizing yourself with your data 1b. Generating initial codes
2. Interpretive coding	2a. Searching for themes 2b. Reviewing themes
3. Definition of overarching themes	3. Defining and naming themes

Table 3.1. Stages and phases of thematic analysis.

In Phase 1a, I immersed myself in the data, became familiar with the transcript, and highlighted terms that stood out. Immersion in the data is vital; it "usually involves 'repeated reading' of the data, and reading the data in an *active* way – searching for meanings, patterns and so on" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87 [emphasis original]; Attride-Stirling, 2001). I read through each transcript at least once before identifying themes and ideas. After reading the data, I started taking notes and developing ideas for coding.

Additionally, I took note of major issues as they came to mind in order to acquire a sense of the various topics embedded in the data. After generating an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting about them, I proceeded to Phase 1b, which involves the production of initial codes from the data. Table 3.2 shows an example of codes applied to a short segment of data.

Data extract	Coded for
It's too much like hard work I mean how much paper have you got to sign to change a flippin' name no I I mean no I no we we have thought about it ((inaudible)) half heartedly and thought no no I jus- I can't be bothered, it's too much like hard work.	1. Talked about with partner 2. Too much hassle to change name

Table 3.2: Data extract, with codes applied (from Clarke, Burns, & Burgoyne, 2005).

Next comes Stage 2, interpretive coding. In Phase 2a, "searching for themes," the researcher allows themes to emerge from the data, rather than searching for pre-defined themes. This phase does not involve theoretical layering, but rather is a natural approach in analyzing data (King & Horrocks, 2010). According to Braun & Clarke (2006), the next phase (2b, "reviewing themes") "re-focuses the analysis at the broader level of themes, rather than codes, involves sorting the different codes into potential themes, and [collates] all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes" (p. 89). I used something similar to mind-mapping to provide a visual representation of codes as I worked to discern the themes. (Figure 3.1 shows an example of mind-mapping from Braun and Wilkinson, 2003.) It is important to note that some participants' responses did not fall into a theme or did not have enough data to be supported. In Phase 2b, it was important to ascertain the relationships among all of the themes, but also to identify those

that are not connected to others. Phase 2b ended with a "collection of candidate themes, and sub-themes, and all extracts of data that have been coded in relation to them" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 90).

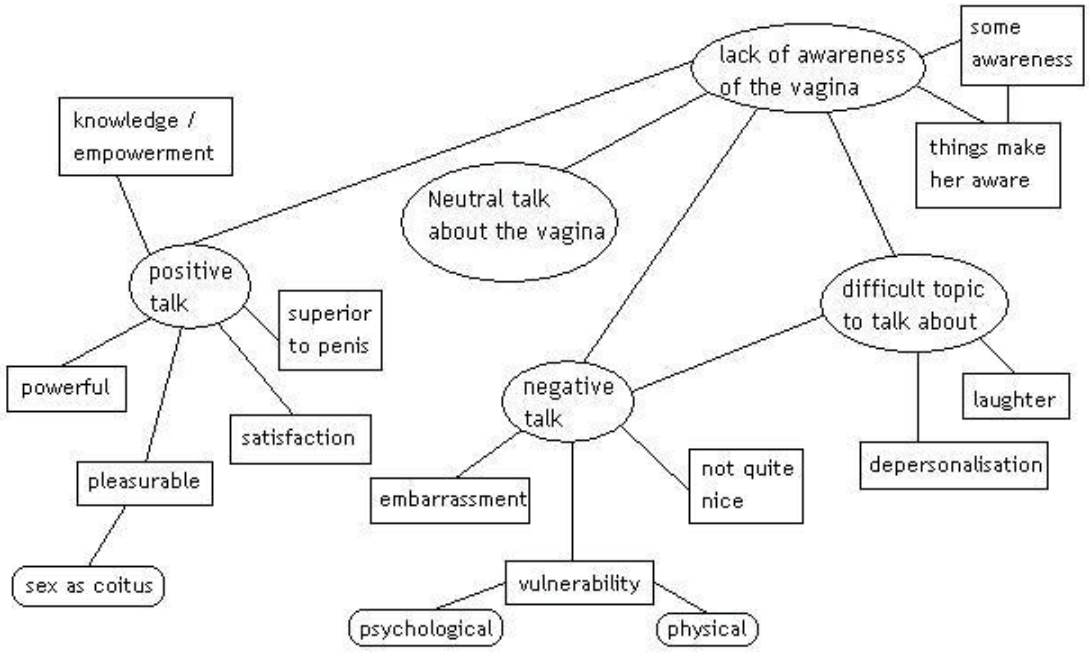

Figure 3.1. Example of mind-mapping (final analysis presented in Braun & Wilkinson, 2003).

Stage 3, definition of overarching themes, involved finalizing the key themes and drawing from theories to support the data. According to Cresswell (2013), if a concept appears more than once, it is likely to be a key theme. Stage 3 reflects theoretical frameworks. I drew from Braun and Clarke's (2006) idea for defining overarching themes:

> It is important to consider how it fits into the broader overall "story" that you are telling about your data, in relation to your research question or questions, to ensure there is not too much overlap between themes. So you need to consider the themes themselves, and each theme in relation to the others. As part of the

> refinement, you will identify whether or not a theme contains any sub-themes. Sub-themes are essentially themes-within-a theme. They can be useful for giving structure to a particularly large and complex theme, and also for demonstrating the hierarchy of meaning within the data. (p. 92)

Refining the themes allowed me to reevaluate the transcripts using theoretical frameworks to ensure that the participants' voices were heard.

The theoretical frameworks I use, counter-storytelling and intersectionality, are key theories for my analysis of participants' transcripts. Counter-storytelling is essential because it positions the participants as co-researchers and co-constructors of knowledge. Furthermore, this approach provides agency for voices that are typically untold and marginalized (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). As I analyzed the participants' transcripts, I framed the participants in their own voices, not mine as the researcher. Likewise, using intersectionality as a key foundational theory informing data analysis had a significant impact on the interpretation of the interviews. Lisa Bowleg (2008) discusses at length the complexities of doing intersectionality research:

> For intersectionality analysts, the key interpretative task is to derive meaning from the observed data on the one hand, and [on the other hand to] interpret this individual level data within a larger sociohistorical context of structural inequality that may not be explicit or directly observable in the data (p. 320).

Finally, I drew on both frameworks, counter-storytelling and intersectionality, to provide a more congruent and consistent approach to data analysis.

Summary

This study's qualitative design allowed me to examine Black males' perceptions

of student success and the experiences they identify as being conducive to their success. The semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B) allowed for detailed dialogue. The research data was transcribed, organized, and coded to discover common themes and patterns in the interviews using theoretical frameworks. Audiotapes and printed transcripts were stored securely to ensure participants' confidentiality. Member checking was a key component to ensure the interviews' accuracy in expressing participants' definitions of success and, more importantly, how their experiences shape their definitions. Peer debriefing also was employed to ensure the greatest degree of validity and to prevent bias. I maintained a reflexivity journal to document my thoughts and perceptions after each interview. The journal also aided in data analysis, allowing me to recall my thoughts during each interview.

Chapter 4. The Data: Co-Researchers' Counter-Stories

This chapter presents the counter-stories of each of the twelve participants[11] interviewed at a Research I university located in the Midwest. As mentioned previously, this study takes a critical approach to qualitative methods in order to attend to structural inequities and the lived experiences of the participants. These counter-stories are important not only because they provide insight about the participants' experiences at an HWI but also because they situate the participants as co-researchers and co-constructors of knowledge. Furthermore, this approach provides agency for voices that are typically unheard and marginalized (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Participants' counter-stories emerged through a semi-structured research instrument adapted from Dr. Gertrude Rolland's (2013) dissertation *African American Male Students' Perceptions of Factors that Contribute to their Academic Success* and Dr. Elon Dancy's (2007) *The Brother Code: Manhood and Masculinity among African American Males in College.* (See Appendix B for several examples of the kinds of questions asked in the interviews.)

In the next chapter, Chapter 5, I will use the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory (CRT), intersectionality, and four conceptions of excellence to analyze the themes that emerge from the counter-stories presented in this chapter. It might be useful to view this chapter as a presentation of the data, and the next chapter as the data analysis. The stories in this chapter provide a sense of each participant's personality and backstory, as expressed in his own words. Chapter 5, on the other hand, will analyze the counter-stories through the theoretical lenses.

[11] Please note that I will use the terms "participant" and "co-researcher" interchangeably.

Twelve Black males participated in the interviews. Their college classification ranged from freshman to graduate students and also included two participants who graduated within the last five years. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 28 years. Five participants reported total family income of less than $30,000 dollars. Only one participant reported income over $100,000. Ten of the twelve reported that they had not taken part in a summer college preparation program prior to attending this institution.

To protect participants' confidentiality, the counter-stories use the names of Black superheroes as pseudonyms: Black Panther, Luke Cage, War Machine, Blade, Miles Morales, Nick Fury, Bishop, Isaiah Bradley, Black Goliath, Cloak, Night Thrasher, and Wilson. I chose Black superheroes' names because the more familiar superheroes in American popular culture are white; Black superheroes historically have not had the mainstream cultural popularity of their white counterparts, despite arguably being stronger and having more entertaining storylines. Using Black superheroes' names not only disrupts the mainstream narrative but also speaks to the historical context in which Black voices are neither heard nor accepted, even in fictional comic book literature.

The interview questions structure the counter-stories in this study. Participants' responses were analyzed thematically. Some of their answers were edited for structural continuity and flow for readers, but their meanings were kept as authentic as possible. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 3, the technique of member checking was employed: participants were asked to review the results of the analysis to ensure that their meaning was not lost in translation. In response, participants overwhelming reported that the data accurately reflected the meanings they had attempted to convey in the interviews. For the sake of participants' anonymity, I edited the counter-stories to remove any

identifying information. However, I also took care to ensure that the participants' stories were not lost. This process of member checking serves to increase trustworthiness within the research and promote congruency (Jones et al., 2013). Using member checking "provides participants with the opportunity to react to the findings and interpretations that emerged as result of [their] participation" (Jones et al., 2013, p. 99).

The following are the stories of Black male collegians' experience while attending an HWI.

Black Panther's Counter-Story: Experiences and Expectations

I'm a 26-year-old Avengers City native. I started my college education in HBCU, the state's only Historical Black College, well, university, and I graduated with my bachelor's in business administration with a focus in management in the spring of 2013. My experiences, at first I was pretty apprehensive to come back here, because I'm a native [i.e. someone who grew up down the street from the university]. I know exactly how I felt when I was in high school. I definitely understood that I was the minority, and I felt like I was always fighting to make myself validated or heard, or just mattering. I definitely dealt with that for a lot of different issues. Now that I've gotten back here, I didn't learn, but the terminology of it is, I think, I definitely suffered from severe imposter syndrome. But, now, coming back, coming from an HBCU prior, too, where I went through a lot of self-identity and really found who I really was, what I was about, my voice, how to think, it allowed me to come back here and see, yes, some of those same themes. Definitely being the minority was not the question; like, that was going to happen. However, I felt a little bit stronger, definitely my presence within the classroom, within the community. I felt like I was better suited to help out. I wasn't still searching in

the maze of who I was and [asking] did my voice matter, and [asking] how could I do certain things, or how to make my voice known.

. As far as within the classroom, I could see how easily for me, just personally, when I would do assignments or I'd do presentations, or even just speaking at public events, where I felt so much confidence and so much assurance in what I had to say and what I was going to do in a different environment, being at a Historically Black College or University … Now getting here, I started to understand that those same pressures and those same apprehensions started to seep back inside me. I started to get a little bit more timid, stressed, and kind of, I don't want to say "cornered in," [but] questioning myself more. "Did I really belong here? Did my work … " How would I want to say? "Did my work size up to my other counterpart, whatever ethnicity they were? Me, being an African American male, did my presence have the same type of feel? Was I more of a diversity student, just as someone to fill in that quota, or was I really someone who mattered? Did I deserve a spot in the classroom?" That's definitely one thing, and, as well, too, I would say, even on the African American community, I sought, as well, a lot of what I thought was going to be more support and what I thought was going to be more of a community, definitely wasn't so much of a community. It was more of a him and herself were on their own, kind of had to figure out their maze. Everyone was trying to just make it by, and that was hard for me, because I was used to, just recently coming from my past university, being supported by my community, supported so much in the backing of in the classroom, on the yard, in the cafeteria, no matter where you went.

Being here, definitely, everyone's still feeling those same apprehensions, but not knowing how to voice it, so it's kind of hard to pull those two, have those kind of

conversations, to say, “Hey, are you dealing with this in the classroom? What do you feel like with this? What’s going on?” Everyone feeling like they’re by their selves and they’re on their own.

In the classroom, like I said, I came in very confident, because I just came from not feeling in any way, type, or form of being the minority. I came in like, “Oh, yeah, I got this. I’m cool, I’m cool.” But, starting to go within the classroom discussions, I definitely started to see that what I felt like was needed to be said, what I felt I wanted to share in the classroom sometimes didn’t make sense to everybody. What I was trying to describe or express in my emotions, or my findings, or just my life journey, when I let those things go and addressed them in the classroom, it wasn’t always something that was received, not so much by the professor, but definitely by my other peers.

I could definitely remember one of my peers, as we were talking about white privilege, turning into a victim and saying, “Should I feel bad because I’m white, because I have blue eyes, because I come from a middle-class family, because I have these blues and blond hair, and I meet all the requirements of the ‘white man?’ Should I feel bad, should I be this?”

I immediately in that moment started to understand, “Okay, I’m not in the same place again.” And, to see my other peers, they didn’t say anything, especially because it was only one other African American student in there. They felt like what he felt, but didn’t have the courage to say it, but he said it. I was perplexed because I said, “Just as quick as we were trying to identify these different things that go on in the classroom and society and things, someone was triggered to feel like they were the victim.” Whereas, instead of acknowledging, “Okay, these are truths, these are things that are true and that

we need to find solutions and ways to help our students out," I saw how quick someone jumped into that victim seat.

That was hurtful to me, because these are also other students, who I'm walking by, who I'm talking to, who are smiling in front of me and had these same type of thoughts. So, it made me think, "Well, when I'm talking to you or when I'm having these outside the classroom relationships, or even the classroom, you really don't understand where I'm coming from, and you're not listening to hear, to try to help understand. You are merely looking for your escape route."

I'm appreciative that I had a past experience prior to being at this predominantly white institution, because I saved myself a couple of semesters of not wanting to say something and finding the courage to say something. So, being able to have that already self-strength, or self-pride, to be able to say, "You know what? Hey, I'm going to say this. This needs to be addressed. This has got to be said," I think was definitely a win for me.

A lot of my college peers a lot of times would say, "Oh, my gosh, I didn't know that's what that meant. I didn't know that that's how you felt. Oh, my gosh, I'm guilty of this. I need to do better." So, definitely that's a win for me.

Also, too, I think for myself, as well, another win is that there was a lot of things that, being at, prior, too, a predominantly Black institution, where that was close to a lot of issues that only focused on one ethnicity, and one only race and community. So, coming here, it allowed me to deal with some of those taboos that also I deal with in my own community, in the Black community.

For instance, LGBTQ, and mental illness, just so many different things are going on in the world alone, not just in the African American community, that are not addressed a lot of times in different places.

So, for here, it allowed me to be more aware. It allowed me to recognize my own privilege that I do have. Even though I am a minority, there are some things that I, as well, too, have privilege, too, definitely being a cisgender. So, for me, that was a win, because now I know how to be able to separate some of the things that I'm going through, but, as well, too, be quickly … Once I get out of the seat of, "Okay, this is what's going on with me," able to jump back into the seat and say, "Okay, hey, I'm also privileged in this area, and this is how I can be a better advocate, a better ally to some other communities and just be there for someone else, as I would want for them."

Also, too, I think a loss for me, I think … I don't know. It's kind of hard for me to say a "loss," but I'll just say for me it's a loss in the sense of, I want to say sometimes I feel like momentum at times. A loss of momentum, because at times I feel like my momentum in the classroom and also outside the classroom is going so fast, like, "Yeah, I'm going to do this, I could do that, and I feel confident, and I'm going to go in here, and I'm going to kill this assignment. I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that," and then something brash happens. Whether it's something out in general, in the world, that now I have to come back to the classroom and address …

So, for instance, the Black Lives Matter Movement, that's something that's definitely going on, and so for me, sometimes in the classroom we couldn't even get to what the class lesson was, because we were addressing what's going on, which is a good way to address it, in the classroom. However, I, being I identify with that community, had

to work through my own emotions and then set those emotions to the side and then become the student. I didn't get to be able to not come to class because I'm Black. I didn't get to be able to not participate in the conversation, because that's something that's sensitive to me.

I had to now become the advocate for that community. I had to be the only voice for that community. I had to be the person with all the answers, and sometimes that pressure and sometimes that stress can become an overload and a loss, because you don't get to have that innocence within the classroom to say, "Hey, I'm just here, like you, wanting to learn. I'm here just like you, pretty much confused, just as confused as you are, as to why things are the way they are in the world. Can we work together?"

It wasn't like that. It was more of, "He knows. Oh, he can get better. Oh, he's okay. Everything in the world ain't that bad. He's Black. He's here. It couldn't be just that bad." So, sometimes having to balance the two, sometimes was a hard thing and would kill, sometimes, what I would feel like, "Oh, man, I'm one of the body." I always was reminded that I'm definitely an outsider, inside.

I chose to come here because of several different people within my fraternity, but not only that, just my family encouraged me that this would be an awesome environment for me to strive, learn, and also to develop new patterns in my life as it pertains to me being a catalyst in the community. I have always been an influential person in the community. I recognized my influence at a very young age, a leader, and the only thing that I had missed, that I didn't have was just the Black and white, the degree, to compensate for what I was doing every day. So, I knew I needed the degree more than the experience.

But, that was prior, too, and I've learned that, no, I do need the degree, but I did need this experience. It has developed me to be a more well-rounded African American man; not just a man, but an African American man, and the things that I'm going to have to face, whether my student is Black, white, Latino, whatever. It's important.

So, my expectations for coming here were, of course, "I'm going to come here, and they're going to definitely welcome me with open arms, and I won't have to deal with, necessarily, trying to find my voice," and different things like that. "It'll definitely be," I just thought, "just an open book. This is for me." That has been true, that has definitely been there. I can't say that I've been limited in any way. However, I think the expectations that haven't been met is definitely the intentionality in problem solving, in going after issues that are going on, that not only just address my community, but address many other communities and how they're going about it. I've definitely been perplexed to see the university's responses in a lot of the campus climate issues.

Luke Cage's Counter-Story: Experiences and Expectations

I'm from Avengers City. I'm the oldest of 12. I'm a product of a single mother. I'm Black. I don't know. I like volunteering. I like doing community service. I'm an 18-year-old freshman. Well, my experiences here inside the classroom has been ... It was a little difficult at first, because I came from a little school, a little school with a large minority population. I had a lot of teachers that knew how to teach Black students, and so it was easy to learn from them because they knew what we needed. Here, it's like they have one generic way of teaching all students, and so it caught me a little off guard and it took me a while to adjust today. I had to learn how to learn on my own. As far as outside the classroom, I mean, I've done pretty well socially. I've made a few good friends here,

and I got involved in Project Threshold, and the people here are just really nice and they really care. I mean, I've had a lot of fun. Positive experiences that I have is I have met a lot of new people, and I met a lot of people that wasn't from America, so I was exposed, like, a different world view than I was used to, so that was nice. I learned to think outside of myself.

But beginning of the semester, when I was still going through the whole make-a-friend process, which was really, really awkward, I made a friend and that was like, we was friends because we was both Black dudes here on a white campus and we have both come from religious families. It made sense for us and we just clicked, but he made another friend, and he kept talking down to him because he was from somewhere different. He kept telling him, "You wouldn't understand because you're not Black. You don't understand," like, "You don't know no better." Me and my friend, we got into an argument about how he was treating my other friend who was white. Now, we are no longer on good terms, but I became friends with the other dude. We cool.

I decided to come here because, like I said, I wanted to show other people that it's attainable. Just because you don't think you can, it doesn't mean you can't. It's not out of reach for anybody no matter where you came from. When I got here, I was like, "Okay, it's going to be hard," like, "I'm going to be way behind all the other students," because I'm not going to say my school prepared me. I love my high school, but it did not prepare me. I knew that before graduating. I knew that my sophomore year that I wasn't going to be prepared.

I've had a lot of positive experience interacting with the faculty and staff here. I'm a very introverted person, so it takes me a lot to actually get to meet and talk to

somebody. A lot of people don't think that, but it really does. The ones I have met that I have talked to, they turned out to be really understanding and just really helpful and they want to see students succeed and not because it's going to help them in any way, but because that's just what they care about. Yeah, Ms. Carter, definitely. I'll just make her shine, I'm happy. When I got here, I didn't know anybody. Well, I take that back. I knew one person, but we wasn't close, because we just never really clicked like that. Ms. Carter, when I got there, she was welcoming and she just told me, "Come in if you ever need anything, I'm going to help you." Last semester, I could not afford my math book, and my financial aid was messed up in the process, and so they wouldn't even give me a book voucher, and she was like, "I'm going to make sure you get this math book." She helped me get that math book, which is the only way I passed the class.

I don't know. She was just really there for me. Anytime you just need to talk to her about anything that's going on, she always listens, whether it's school-related or not. If she see you doing bad, she's going to call you and she be like, "Hey, I need you to get them grades up. I need you to do better because what you're doing is not acceptable." I'm not even going to lie. I made three Cs last semester, and she was like, "Hey, Luke, what's going on? You know better. I've seen you work firsthand, what are you doing? What are you not doing?" I was like, "Well, listen…" She's like, "No excuses." It just showed me that I had somebody there to care for me.

Blade's Counter-Story: Experiences and Expectations

My name is Blade. I'm a senior. I'm majoring in computer science engineering. I am involved in different organizations, such as a fraternity, the National Society of Black Engineers. I've also been a part of different other clubs, like the Rocket Team,

Design/Build/Fly, which is engineering clubs, and also other activities such as I used to be an RA [resident advisor], I'm involved in sports recreationally.

I expected there to be people that were there that looked like me to support me, but in high school, I went to Allen High School, so I knew how it was going to be coming into, I guess, the university. The majority of my high school was white, or Indian, or African American ... I mean, not African American, Indian or Asian. There was maybe 4% to 5% Black people at my high school, so I knew coming to Marvel University would be similar as high school, so it wasn't going to be a major culture shock to me, so I expected that it would be the same. I feel like I would have been able to assimilate well based off my prior experience in high school. I expected it to be like high school. The classes, I expected them not to be too different. Allen was a presti- ... Not prestigious, but it was a good high school to go to and learn at, so academically I felt that I'd do well, especially from the summer course. I got a A in that class, so I was like, "Okay, so maybe this is doable." I just took one class, so that was fine. Then also, coming in my freshman year, I was in the band in high school, so I was going to do the band in college again. I knew socially I would have friends in the band. I know I'm a personable person, so I feel like I wasn't going to have trouble coming up and, I guess, making friends, or I wasn't going to have trouble with most of the main things that people would come into college having trouble with and finding a friend group, because I already had my niche, in the band and DEP (Diversity Engineering Program), so those were my expectations coming in.

It's been a while, so since freshman year to senior year, because freshman year to sophomore year I was in the band. Got out of the band, joined a fraternity for

predominantly ... It was an African American fraternity. Then basically there was a switch between my sophomore year to my junior year, to where I had time to switch my viewpoint, because back whenever I was in the band, it was interesting because I saw that I had friends, but I couldn't necessarily fit in. I was always different.

I felt the university was meeting my expectations in the fact that it provided me with classwork, it provided me with a place to actually be, which is as the different organizations, so I felt like it was providing what I needed at the time being, but as time went along, classes got harder, my niche, I didn't really fit as much in the band like I thought I would, so after sophomore year, freshman year, microaggressions and different racist incidents caused me to not really be a part of the band anymore.

After that, I had joined the fraternity, and a new lens came down to where I could actually see that where I was wasn't where I was supposed to be, and where I am now ... I fit where I am now, but the university isn't actually doing very much to accommodate people who look like me, and who act like me, or who are struggling like me, because back in the band, they all had it. They had money. They were all financially stable. I knew I had my own problems, and I couldn't fit in with them. I met my group junior to senior year, and I knew that I was still having those same problems, but now I had people who had the same problems as me, and we could talk about it, and we realized together that the university wasn't doing what we needed in order to continue to go here, or to actually thrive in the university setting. It wasn't so much of a shock to me to find out that in my classes I was going to be one of the only ones who looked like me. In high school, it was the same. College, I expected it. I think this is the message in the first semester if I actually had a Black professor, but I know ... I've actually had two Black

professors this semester, but coming in from high school to freshman, sophomore, junior year, I knew that my classroom experience was going to be the same. I was going to stick out based on my skin color. I didn't want to speak out too much for fear that I would look differently based off my skin color. It was, I guess, normal for me, based off what I'd been used to. I didn't like it, but I knew that was the reality that I was faced with.

Going to professors, talking to them for office hours, they were available, but I knew that based off our conversations, they wanted to see me succeed, but I feel like they didn't want to see me succeed as much as my white counterparts. Let's say if I was in the office with my professor, he would spend extra time with a white student than he would with me, because I would see it. I would be waiting outside his office for a good 10, 20 minutes, and they were asking maybe one to two questions, because I could hear it. I would go in and ask a question, he would point something out and be like, "Okay, what else do you need?" Then he would be done quicker than what he would with my white counterpart. He wouldn't give me the extra study tips, or the extra things that he would the other people. The thing is I realized that, and I realized would have to study more if I wanted to succeed, and I would have to get it on my own. That was mainly inside the classroom.

Outside the classroom, I was in Design/Build/Fly, Rocket Team, engineering programs, or engineering clubs, outside activities. In those clubs, it was majority students, so I guess with it being majority students, I didn't feel as much, I guess, of the microaggressions. There were still some. You can't really get rid of all of it out of everybody, but let's say with Rocket Team, we were just a group of students trying to get the job done, and get it done the best way possible.

Now, with Design/Build/Fly, we were trying to get the job done, but we each had different tasks that we had to do. I guess in that one, you could see that the more trivial tasks were assigned to me, like sanding a plane, not really coming up with designs, something like that, but I would be the one sanding the plane, doing more of the laborious work. That was in the engineering clubs. I'm not saying that were racist or microaggressions, because as you can see, the Rocket Team, we were all just trying to get the job done, whereas Design/Build/Fly was a club where I was given trivial tasks.

Basically, my experiences were different based on those two engineering organizations, but I guess that's with engineering. When it comes to the band, that's interesting. The band was a place where I enjoyed my time at practice. I had a few friends that I could actually call my friends, but they were mainly acquaintances. The thing that hit me the most was ... Of course there were microaggressions, there were jokes cracked about the hoodie that I wore, or I guess small things.

I can't really recall any exact moments, but of course I remember the microaggressions, but the main thing that hit me whenever I realized that this was not the place for me was there was a time whenever we gave nicknames to our trombone section. During Texas week we have a nickname thing where we give each other nicknames. My people above me decided that it would be a great idea to call my nickname Trayvon. It's great because this was 2014, so it was a year after it happened, and they say, "Hey, it's great that you're Trayvon, because you wear a hoodie." That was their insider reasoning for giving me that nickname. Interesting, right? To them, it was funny. It was a great joke. They didn't really realize the significance, but that was my nickname in the

trombone section, which is whenever I knew I had to get out. That was just from the band, though.

I realized that wasn't the place for me. I didn't want to be called Trayvon, so decided that I'd rather go elsewhere. My experiences after that, let's say culture organizations, it was a family. I knew I could fit in, not just because of the color of my skin, but my socioeconomic background. They've had a better understanding of me and where I came from, and I found a place where they would accept me for me, and not remind me that I'm Black and that's not accepted in the country that we live in.

I won freshman and sophomore year because I got to go to the football games for free, and because I got to go to bowl games for free, and that was dope. I got to go to New Orleans and Florida. That was great. One of the main reasons I actually stuck with the band, we got free food. There was lot of perks to it, other than the other stuff. That would be a win. Another win was ... I guess the big thing for me is traveling. Rocket Team, we got to go to Virginia for a competition. We didn't really do much with Design/Build/Fly.

My other experiences I guess for personal wins, enriching wins, I would say being a part of MSBE (Marvel Society for Black Engineers) for four years, and getting to see that grow. Additionally, me and my friend, just re-formed a gospel choir this semester, so that was a really enriching experience for me because ... We had practice yesterday for two and half hours, just having fun. Having fun, singing, and bonding, just because we could. Then I guess Alpha Phi Alpha, my fraternity, I would keep going back to it. Finding that brotherhood, finding a place where I could be accepted, have fun kicking

with people, and know that I'll be accepted no matter what I do would be another win for me.

War Machine's Counter-Story: Experiences and Expectations

My name is War Machine. I am a 20-year-old sophomore. I am a Human Relations major. I'm from Northwest Avenger City. I live with both of my parents. I have three siblings, two brothers, one sister. I also have three foster siblings. I've always wanted to go to Marvel University since my senior year because I wanted to stay close to my grandparents, because I've always lived with them throughout periods of my life, and I didn't want to go too far without being able to see them. I came here to realize my dreams of being a counselor and just helping people, helping children specifically, and giving back to my community and making a difference. I feel like I have the best opportunity to do that here. I didn't know what to expect coming here. I had taken college courses at a smaller college while I was in high school, so I kind of had some experience with college courses, but when I got here it was nothing like I had experienced at the smaller college. Once I got here, I thought I wanted to be a psychiatrist, so I came in Psych Premed. I didn't start off as Human Relations. My path changed when I got into my Precalc 3 class. It was more difficult than what I had expected it to be, and so after going through advisement with Ms. Carter and praying a lot about it, I decided that Human Relations would be a better fit for me. When I dropped the class and switched over my major, my road became a lot smoother than what it had been previously. Depending on the size that a class ... Bigger classes tend to be more distant and withdrawn from the professor, depending on who it is and if I know somebody in the class. Smaller classes tend sometimes to be more comfortable, also depending on who

they are, but I know this semester I have a couple of smaller classes, but it's more distant because the people and they aren't ... they don't look like me necessarily. It's hard to be in relationships with people if you don't know them, know them and who they are, and where they come from, so I feel like in class it really does depend on the individual and their willingness to get to know other people, and from diverse backgrounds. I feel like that reflects on how we build relationships and how it will affect the in-class performance. I've had positive experiences with professors specifically giving help when I needed it; always willing to give me enough information that I could succeed and do better on tests or quizzes, and just being a resource if I needed them later on in the semester or even after I've gone through their class. They've been willing to help, even write recommendation letters or just checking up on me, seeing how I'm doing. That's definitely been a positive experience.

Outside of class, in organizations, clubs or even in residence halls, I feel like it's a lot easier to build those relationships and bonds with either residents or other RAs [resident advisors], or if you're living here, to build that relationship with your hall mates because you're not only living with each other, but you're essentially working together and possibly within the same classes, so you're there, you're helping each other, so you're there as a support system.

I haven't really had a negative experience, but I will say that I did have a TA who just assumed that I did not like her for whatever reason, and so I felt like that played a part in some of the grades that I was receiving in this class until I actually saw her one day walking from her class or whatever. She was like, "Oh, you know, you registered for my class next semester." I was like, "I purposely did it." She was like, "Well, I thought

you didn't like me." She laughed about it and so it got my mind thinking, since you thought I didn't like you up until this point, did that have a direct effect on my grades? I was kind of taken aback. It was like, I never experienced any dislike toward her. I always interacted with her, asked questions, answered questions and participated actively, so I never saw that coming. It was kind of a blind-side to see that and it was a shock to think, for me to realize that sometimes even your TAs, professors, could have preconceived notions and thoughts about their students regardless if they knew them personally or not.

Sometimes, random posters and individual flyers that we've seen around campus that's spewing hate or showing a negative view of who the African American community is as a whole, so I feel that would be a loss because I know we can't directly get rid of things like that, but nipping stuff like that in the bud early on, the university could definitely on that, so not being as quick to handle certain situations like that would be a loss to us all. It can be disturbing because it feels like if the university isn't on our side, then who is in? I feel we do a great job and other administrative people who fight for our cause and fight for us, and our rights and just fight for us in general, I feel they do a good job to help us get what need, but I feel the university definitely not acting quick enough, and showing direct and explicit support of us, it is damaging.

Being Black means a lot because we have a lot of success with Black people in the world, but not enough. I feel I see different individuals and the potential that we have is crazy because the change that we could all bring about if we stuck together and we buckled down and took care of business, and actually we finished our degrees or whatever, our past may lead us, but being Black and successful is important to me to show not only the people around me that we can do it, but to show myself that I can do it

as a Black male regardless of how they said I wasn't going to make it, how they said that I couldn't do it. That I did it, that yeah, I'm successful and I'm also Black. Outside of that negative part of it, I love being Black and I don't intend to be nothing less than successful, and to be proud of it because knowing that I did it, regardless of what the statistic said and what the papers or the books or the people said that, but I did it.

Miles Morales's Counter-Story: Experiences and Expectations

My name is Miles Morales, 28, African American male. Graduated in 2012 with my Bachelor's in multiple disciplinary studies. Most of the work was in human relations. Then I proceeded with my Master's and graduated with that in 2014, adult and higher education with an emphasis in intercollegiate athletic administration. My parents are from Ghana, West Africa, so I am of Ghanaian descent. They moved here in the 80's. I have a younger brother who's 23 and an older brother who's 36. When I first started my senior year of high school, my plan was to go to a community college, from my hometown, Avengers City, and just do my general education there and then transfer on to a traditional four-year university. My reasons being were because it would be cheaper and maybe the academic rigor would be weaker at a community college. It would just be an easier transition.

We had a college counselor who started my senior year [of high school], and she basically told me, "You have the grades. You have the community service and all the accolades to go right to a four-year university," and so that's when I started to explore. I was a Marvel University football fan, just kind of growing up in this state, how can you not be? My dad was kind of like, "It's a good school. It's a name-brand school. If you have the opportunity, you should go." To be honest, I had no reason not to apply and

attend Marvel University, and that's how I got here. I didn't really have much of an expectation. I guess I expected, I was supposed to be a doctor, so I was supposed to come in and be pre-med, make straight A's, go on and be a doctor right now. It's funny, I have friends who are actually doctors, and they just now became a doctor, which is we're talking 10, 11 years ago that they started on this journey.

I didn't know what to expect. I never really partied in high school. I didn't go out. I just went to school, did community service things, went home. I didn't really have an idea of what college was. I didn't really watch any movies or things like that, so from the social aspect, from Greek life and everything to even the academics of it, I kind of had a blank slate, and it was just, okay, I graduate and then I go to college. That was just what I was supposed to do. It wasn't if or a possibility, it was kind of that's the next step in life for me. Everything you want to do is here. Any type of niche, any type of college experience you want or you desire, it's here, from big-time football program, big-time athletics, Greek life, whether you're talking about Black Greek, white Greek, multicultural council, you have here. Any type of club, social organization, just interest group, you can find, anything from the grassroots level as we're just a bunch of people who like this certain video game, or to the big-time people like, "I want to be on stomp committee," "I want to be on homecoming committee," "I want to be in homecoming court." Whatever type of organization, club, you want to have, you want to be a part of, you can find. Whatever social circle you want to be a part of, you can find.

Really, whatever educational opportunity you want to pursue, you can find at Marvel University. That's indicative to the size of the school, it's a research 1, division 1

level institution. From the offerings of Marvel University as an institution, plentiful. Plentiful.

I think they were, I would say typical but also eye-opening as well. I think one thing that people have to take into account is personal incentive and your personality are determined, I would say, half, if not more of your experience in anything. I say that to say this: I came from an average to big-sized high school. I graduated with 250 students. Avengers City was urban, so it was very mixed. It wasn't just all the way affluent or all the way white or Black or any type of ethnic diversity. It kind of had a lot.

With that being said, I kind of came here, I was ready to be part of an almost 4,000 freshman class, ready to sit in the lecture class with 300, 400 students. That wasn't surprising to me at all. That wasn't shocking to me at all. I'm very extroverted, so it wasn't anything for me to ... I didn't have a culture shock like Marvel University is too big or too small.

With that being said, my classroom experiences were what I expected. Some classes were small. As you start to get into your major-specific classes, they're small. You start to see the same people, same faces over again, but freshman year, even sophomore year, I was doing a lot of those general education big lecture classes. I think my zoology class was 450 students enrolled. I come in, whether I sit in the back or sit in the front, there's a lot of students there. Everyone's kind of busy with their clickers and taking your own notes. I don't even know if they use clickers anymore.

Then as I start to mature and progress in my coursework and in my college career, you're a little more focused each year, you have the end goal in mind. Okay, around your junior year, senior year, okay, now graduation's getting real. I have three more semesters

left. I have 60 hours of coursework left. It's not just when you come in freshman year, "Oh, graduation is four, five years away." No. It's a year, year-and-a-half out, where you could legit walk across that stage. I attribute where I am now to being a sum of all the parts that I experienced in my time at here. To get perspective, from the different jobs and organizations I was a part of, I was a part of Housing and Food my freshman year, I went to a conference. I was a part of Black Student Association for the first two years of my undergrad. We went to some planning conferences as well as the Black government conferences. I was a part of recruitment services. I was a scout. I was a diversity admission program intern. I was information technology lab monitor for about five, six years. I was a suite host in the athletic department for six seasons including my time as a graduate student. I briefly had a stint in student government. I was a program assistant for the summer enrollment program for two years out. All those entities are all over the place. They're interconnected, but they're also separate and solid as well.

That is what I think about when I think about my undergrad experience. There were so many different resources, organizations, clubs, jobs, and people I met that in a lot of ways shaped me to where I am today, and for a lot of the reasons why I'm employed. I wouldn't be able to come back if I didn't have those experiences in undergrad and in graduate school.

But I also don't like how siloed this place is; For example, just from a social aspect. There's so many different types of students here, have so many different types of needs. I'll never forget my freshman year. A few of my friends, we were breaking it down, and there's always a pecking order. When I talk about social, you're talking about

being young early 20 males, you're looking at women. We're thinking, okay, what's the pecking order as far as what type of guys are the women going to go for?

From my lens, it was top dog were the student athletes. When I say student athletes, football players. They had first pick of the litter. Whatever girl they wanted, they had first right of refusal. Then you break it down further. Football player, okay, do they have a car or not? Okay, that's another thing. Do they start on the team or not? Are they the quarterback, star running back, receiver, whoever? There's that pecking order within that hierarchy.

Then upperclassmen are always obviously going to have more pick over younger underclassmen, again, with the same different things. You boil it down all the way to I was a freshman, I didn't have a car, I lived in the dorms, I didn't have a TV in my room, I didn't have money or anything like that, I definitely didn't drink. I didn't have access to alcohol. I wasn't Greek, Black or white. Those are all the type of things just from the social perspective that this place provides before you get into things like race, class, and gender where it's really, okay, someone's not going to be with someone because of X. These are just the things that on paper already create a pecking order.

I use that example because there's so many different types of students here from different backgrounds, they all can't be serviced the same way. Just from an academic standpoint, the academic rigor of everyone's high school is all over the place. High school is easy to me, especially my senior year. My only real classes were English and government, and those were still very easy.

I hadn't taken math in like two years, and I'm comparing my classes to kids who came from schools in other parts of the country. They were like, "My classes were very

hard," so when they came to college, they tested in to higher math classes, and they were able to comp out of English classes. They took more AP courses and they "CLEP" (College Level Examination Program) out all these hours. Already, academic rigor across the board from students is so different, from a student athlete to an underprivileged student from rural America, and everything in between.

I also think that there needed to be a better job of people who weren't so privy to really discovering this place. I'm an extrovert. I was one who was going to go out, going to meet people, I was going to go to the meetings, go to the clubs, go to the organizations, but not everyone is like me. Some people are more reserved, some people are more scared, some people are more introverted. I think there needed to be more of an outreach from administration, from student affairs, from programing, from housing and food, to really reach those students who didn't identify with the "me's" of the world. I'm going to survive here because I like meeting people; I like to try new things.

There's people who don't survive here or didn't survive because of some of those reasons. Of course, academic rigor or finances, things like that, but this is truly a place where people can belong. I think there just needed to be a better job of reaching out from here as a university.

Nick Fury's Counter-Story: Experiences and Expectations

My name is Nick Fury. My classification is a sophomore and my major is health and exercise science with pre-nursing. This is my second year at this university. I'm an African American male. I was raised by a white woman, which is my mother. So I have the perception of both backgrounds as an African American and as growing up with white supremacy more-so. One of the things that got me to attend this institution, well,

first off, it wasn't on my list of schools until counselor from my high school brought me here. She brought me here, because she felt that I would get more of a home feel coming from that high school, then I would coming from another school and it would work better in my favor, because there's more support system here. And so one of the things that drew me to this institution was how much people made it feel like it was home, like it was family. So meaning that even though there's not as many African Americans or people of my color on this campus, the amount of people that are of my color on this campus, kind of made it feel like it was one big family and they all stick together and they all showed a lot of support and encouragement on trying to be here.

As far as education-wise, they're meeting expectations, but as far as a community purpose-wise, I think that they need to do better job of making sure that everybody's receiving the same amount of equality around here, because I don't think that we're getting the same justice as people that don't look like us are getting. We're not getting treated equally. I remember when the blackout happened; when we stood in the union and wanted to talk to anybody who didn't look like us and figure out what it was that we could do make ourselves get the same justice. A lot of people just walked away and just called us names and said, "What are they doing?" Called us "monkeys", called us this and that and it really showed – the university president didn't really step up during that time period, even though he says, but it didn't really show. There wasn't any strong support system from the staff as much as there could have been.

Even in some of my in-class experiences, the majority of the time in any of my classes I'm almost, if not the only African American in my class and it kind of makes me feel almost out of place, because there's not a lot of people that look like me in my

classes and so I kind of feel like I'm singled out, out of all people, because I'm African American and everybody else is Caucasian, international, but there's not a lot of people that look like me, so I feel like I have more eyes looking on me than anybody else does, so anything I do or mess up, little things, makes me a bad person, compared to if they mess up, it's not really a big deal.

I've notice a lot, like, the majority of our time we sit there and we walk, walking on campus there's a lot of people that are segregated. Like you'll see your African Americans walking with your African Americans, your international students walking with your international and your white students walking with your white students and there's not really a lot of – it's more so segregated around the whole campus. A lot of people don't associate with 'em, because "Oh, he's Black. He's white. I don't trust him. I don't like him," without getting to know the person. And so you start to see a difference of the segregation on the campus, because nobody's really trusting anybody, unless you're my color and I think it could be better if we started to build a – come together as one and not try to judge somebody by their color and try to actually get to know somebody, because you can't judge a book by its cover in my eyes. I don't judge nobody. I love all people, whether or not you love me or not, I'm still gonna treat you the same way I would treat my mother, treat my dad, treat anybody.

Some of the positive experiences that I've had here, I've been able to get a lot of assistance as far as financial-wise from the university and a lot of mentorship, coming from the staff, the university community, SAAB [Student African American Brotherhood]. I've been able to get into a lot of organizations that provide the resources I need to succeed and to retain at this university and they actually want me here rather than

somewhere else and not really caring about you. So I feel that the fact that they want me here and they're trying their best to get all the resources that I could need is showing that they're stepping up to try to keep us here and try to make sure that we're not just another statistic. Another experience that I've had, when I first came to the university, I only had probably $3000 in scholarships and coming from out of state, I'm paying $36,000 or 37,000, so one of the things that helped out a lot was the support system I had from my mentors that were able to give me the connections to get some more help financial-wise, so I didn't have to struggle as much. Provide me a work-study job, so I can find way to pay for college. And also be able to give me extra scholarship or help on rent or anything like that that I need in order for me not to struggle as an individual here. Coming out of state, they provide that home feel for me.

A negative experience that I've had on this campus would be probably being racially profiled, not only by peers, but by employees, bosses and people that just don't look like me. They treat me as I'm below them and don't give me the same respect. And there's been certain times where I've had to be ignorant in order to get some respect, because they're not treating me the same way they would treat somebody that looks like them. I had a supervisor who was white who didn't look like me and he didn't give me the same equal rights as he gave all his other employees and always wanted to criticize and judge everything I did, even though I was doing the right thing. He tried to humiliate me in front of my friends when we were on break and when I told him I still have a couple more minutes on my break, he thought it was OK to try to force me to get up and go back to work when I still had a couple minutes on my break, so with that I had to take it straight to my boss, because he still thought that his work was better than anybody

else's, so I took that issue up to my boss and made him look kind of stupid, because he didn't think that I was the one that was right, but when I explained it to her, she said she felt that I was in the right and he was in the wrong and I felt that he was judging me racially, because I don't look like him or he felt like he was better than me.

Bishop's Counter-Story: Experiences and Expectations

My name is Bishop. I'm a junior majoring in Sports Management. I'm from Avengers City, so I've always grown up loving the university sports. My family graduated from here so it's kind of in my DNA to go here as well. I definitely expected everything to be fair, to be friends with everyone, no discrimination, none of that. I definitely wanted to be like a ... I thought it would be more of a fairy tale from looking back it seems more of a fairy tale than how it really was. I went to a high school that pretty much had every race. Everyone loved everybody, there was no discrimination. If there was a group project, everybody was willing to work with anybody. There was never an issue. When I came here there would be times when my professor would be like, all right everyone break up into groups of four, and I'm sitting in between two different sets of white people, and their backs instantly turned against me. Instead of wanting to work with me, they get uncomfortable and want to work with their group. I end up having to beg someone to work with me. So, that's what I came to realize that the whole college thing can seem like a fairy tale because schools kind of sell false hope. They don't really ... not schools, like television sells false hope when it comes to college. It's not really how it is.

I'd say as a whole, my experiences weren't bad. I've had a good time. I've made a lot of friends. The positive, I'm a Sports Management major so I enjoy working for the

football team, just the sports in general, basketball going to the tournament last year, football team going to bowl games, this year, meeting my fraternity brothers, stuff like that, so I'd definitely say those are some positive influences since I've been here, positive experiences.

Most of my negative experiences probably came out of my freshman year, because that's when I was still trying to find myself and find my group. When I first came in, I was hanging out with a lot of IFC [InterFraternity Council] guys and the negative experiences were things weren't very realistic with them. A lot of them were pretty privileged. They'd want to do this, or take the private jet to that, and if I couldn't do it I'd get made fun of for it because I didn't have the money for it. Or, like I said before with the class thing, people would turn their back against me instead of actually helping me out. Really I just have to say, discrimination even if it wasn't on purpose, there was a lot of it. I don't think a lot of them know they were being that way. Just because that's how they were raised and they weren't used to being around Black people. That's definitely probably a negative experience. They weren't really aware of how they were treating us. They just thought that was the norm.

Isaiah Bradley's Counter-Story. Experiences and Expectations

My name is Isaiah Bradley. I'm a senior here at the university. I was born on the East side of the state, but when I was seven I moved to Avengers City. So, I could say I kind of grew up in Avengers City and I'm from Avengers City 'cause that's where I spend most of my life at. A little bit about myself, before coming to college I was very passionate about track and field. That was the only reason I wanted to come to college. I grew up with my grandmother, but she ingrained in me that college was like 13th grade.

There was no option if you were gonna go to college, or anything like that. I wanted sports to take me to college. I was good academically. I had very good grades. Very good ACT score but I didn't want to do school. I just wanted to do athletics and then get a degree and make my grandma happy. Then go to the Olympics. That's pretty much what I wanted to do.

When I got here I saw a complete difference in collegiate track and field than high school track and field. It's not fun and games anymore. It's more of a business. So that's kind of how I transitioned out. It was a common agreement with me and my coaches that it wasn't for me anymore. And I luckily had my grandmother there to push me to pursue academics and always make good grades and have a ACT score. I was here on a full academic run but I was a preferred walk-on so they didn't give me any money. I didn't lose anything. I chose to step away. That was probably one of the smartest decisions I had before coming here.

And now, serve as president of a black mentoring program. I'm a Marvel Scholar here at the university. I serve as president of a leadership committee. I'm also in Student Society for Human Relations. With a group of my friends, I started a mentor program at DC Comics School. We mentor fifth through eighth grade. It's 92% African American so the majority of the students that we work with look like me, talk like me, and they're from the same side of town. Not necessary where I was raised but where I was born at. I identify with some of the struggles that they have early in life; I had early in life so it's cool getting to hang out with them every week and getting to pour into them and see them grow and look up to us. I think that's what it's all about. Pulling up people behind you.

To be honest I didn't expect this. Actually came on my official visit during the Big Cities bus trip. So, for people not familiar with the university, the Big Cities bus trip is a big event that we bring in students from three big cities in other states. There's a whole bunch of people. We've put on a good recruiting effort throughout the African American community. All the organizations are there, all of the Greeks are there. There was a lot of Black people there so I was thinking when I got here it was gonna be a whole bunch of Black people. I was excited for that because I kind of grew up in Avengers City, where out of 450 kids in my school, only 20 were Black and I was the only Black person to come here out of my school so I was looking to open up, find people that look like me, that identified with me. Once I got here I saw that I'm kind of back in the same situation except a little worse.

I think back then, racism was kind of oblivious to me. My grandma kept me on guard because she was with the Civil Rights Movement and things like that but I was love. I was the fastest kid in my high school. I was running track with the high school when I was in junior high so it was like I was known throughout my town and I never had a problem with white people. I was always at white people's house, staying the night. White people bought me clothes, food, anything but I really saw the true nature of who people were 'cause I was in a, I guess a, shelter of athletics, but once I got here I kind of saw people's true colors. I even look back now and the people that were taking care of me, and things like that, I'll see their Facebook post or something talking about hey, vote Trump, blah blah blah, or something like that. It's just crazy. These are the same people that would look out for me. I could depend on them for anything, I felt like.

I think that's what I really realized by coming here is that everything isn't so rosy. I guess we haven't made as much progress as I would like to have hoped back then. But I definitely think it was a good eye opener for me. I guess, I think I had a little easier transition than a lot of people here because I grew up in that kind of background with the white people. I didn't feel as disadvantaged or uncomfortable as some people might because I had been there before but it was definitely there.

The second day of college. It came early. Me and one of my best friends growing up, we played little league football together. He's a white dude and he wrestled here. He signed on a wrestling scholarship. I came here on a track scholarship. We came the same year. Like I said I was from a white town so everybody from my school was talking about the frat houses. I didn't know nothing about 'em. I thought that was the place where everyone was welcome. It was cool, it was the party spot. Me and him were like heck yeah. I think it's their bid day, or something like that, where all of the frats have a party. He was like, let's just go house hopping, blah blah blah, and I was like all right cool.

So, I went and then it was like we were getting kicked out of every house but I noticed it was like *I* was getting kicked out. If we were together, then they would kick us both out. But if we had separated, like I was talking to somebody and he was talking to somebody, they'd be like hey, you can't be here. I was like well, all right. And I didn't really notice it but it was happening at every single house and I went to every house that Marvel University had that night. We were just getting kicked out, getting drunk at one, getting kicked out, go to the next one. We wasn't really tripping but then we got to the last house and I'll leave this fraternity nameless. We got there and we were cool. We had actually known more people in this fraternity from our high school than any other houses

that we had been to so, we were like all right, if we ain't cool nowhere, we cool here. That's why we saved it for last.

So then, we get there, same situation happens but this time my friend had been messing with this girl and she had took his glasses so he needed to get his glasses. So I was waiting on the stairs. It was like yo, you gotta go. I was like I'm just waiting on my friend to get his glasses and then we leaving. Their houses are huge so they got like a staircase going up like this and then one like that and I'm standing kind of on the bottom half and the kid is standing above me and then I just feel a beer start pouring down my shoulder and he's like I said you gotta fucking leave. So then, it was pretty much blackout from that. I jumped up, hit the kid and then it was really just me and my friend. I had no idea where he came from. I turned around, he was on the wrestling team, he was in there slamming people. And I was just sitting there throwing for my life. It was like us against the whole house. We ended up down the stairs and then they pushed us out of the house.

When we were comfortable we were like man, we didn't get touched. We was cool but it was crazy to see that happen. Especially from people, like I said, that I had grown up with. These people's parents that pretty much like taken me in and things like that. It also comforted me that one of my white friends was there for me, he rode for me. We've known each other since we were little but he rode for me 'til the end. He was like yeah, that's not right and 'til this day neither one of us have been to the frat houses since or go to the bars off campus, anything like that.

I think one of the positive experiences is I guess you're a token here at the university. By being a Black person here, you could really shine. I feel like you can be

heard a lot easier than to, say if you were going to a HBCU because everybody looks like you and everybody's fighting for the same position. Here, there's not that many of us and I feel like is your struggles aren't necessarily heard, like your accomplishments academically, and things like that, are seen and recognized. I think that's one of the positive things that comes out of here but then it's also negative because, like I said, you get used as the token. I remember, on one of the admissions tickets, I was on the cover of Major Options or something, and the school had to quit publishing it 'cause they got accused of showing false diversity. It was me, a Hispanic lady and a Asian lady on the cover but it didn't show – that's not who's here in a mass majority so I guess they kind of got a fake diversity thing from the university newspaper so they quit publishing it. It's kind of a fine line that you ride going to school here, I think.

I think the office of diversity affairs is a win. I think the work that they're doing is positive. I don't like it fast enough for the audience, how fast they want it but I know, just from working there, people are working. They're trying. I think that's a win. And just to see having a African-American be a vice president of the university, it's like we don't [usually] get to see that. We see the rappers, we see the people on TV. It's like people in all these high positions, a person of color got moved to Associate Dean. These are things that we don't think about before coming to college. We don't see anybody in those areas. I think those are somewhat wins, in that regard.

Now loss is, loss is everywhere I been. Loss is, like I said earlier, not being heard through your struggles but being recognized through your achievements. Like I said, it's a fine like between that because they don't want to hear what you're going through but if you're doing something to benefit the university, then, all right, we'll put you here, here,

here, you can go talk to all these students, things of that nature. I think loss is just being the token, being unheard. Let's see, specific losses, just I think that racism is just blatantly – last week there was a kid on campus that said make America white again. It's like, even though, me personally, I don't take any offense. I mean, I do take offense to it, but it's not like I let it get me down to the point where it's gonna stop me from doing what I gotta do during the day, but I notice some people do. I think it's terrible that the fact that they have to go through that. I know people have different strengths of things they can deal with.

I remember when we had a, this is away from the African American community, rally on campus for the Hispanic community and somebody just yelled out, "build the wall, deport them all." Like me, somebody could yell out something to me and depending on what it was and the magnitude, like I said, I could just shrug it off. I saw my co-worker just break down in tears. And then it just like hit me, it's like why does it even matter what this group is doing. If it doesn't negatively impact you then let it be, let people be. I think that's another big loss is just the blatant racism, especially lately. And then we're on a public campus so anybody's welcome. Another specific loss I can name is the, I don't know who thought it was a good idea to put a freedom of speech board on the south end of campus. I think that was last semester, it could have been last year. It was crazy the things that people put on it. I don't know how people thought that was a good idea to do for the campus. That pretty much just opened it up to more blatant racism and more bigoted talk that people won't say in front of you.

My classroom experiences have been positives. I love the human relations program, especially the intro to human relations class, because I was a TA [teaching

assistant] in there for three semesters, so it was cool to see people come in with these biases. They didn't know their privilege. They didn't know these things about different people. But then, at the end of the class, they're like damn, this is one of the best classes I've ever taken. Some people changed their major to human relations. Some people join us to fight the good fight. It's kind of cool. But then, I remember one semester, it was actually during the [University of] Missouri incident that they had, the racism that they had on their campus, when we did the blackout, it was during out class time, so we took class time to come down to support the blackout because that's what human relations is. It's crazy because one of the kids in the class reported us to the professor for that. He said he shouldn't have felt like he should be dragged into that and some people just completely miss the message. We weren't forcing anyone to be there. Anybody could have left at all means. It's just, human relations is to open people's eyes and some people come in close-minded and to see that change, in especially non-minorities, is crazy. It's a good transformation.

Black Goliath's Counter-Story: Experiences and Expectations

I'm Black Goliath, I actually grew up in Avengers City, went to school down there from kindergarten basically, to graduation, at Avengers High School, it's basically an all-Black high school. Did sports there, family heritage up there, pretty strong family structure in Avengers City, grew up knowing a lot of people, good foundation in terms of my parents, in terms of setting the board for education, four sisters, only boy. Played sports throughout school, number two in my class in terms of academics coming out. Good GPA, good class rank, all that kind of stuff. I think one of the reasons that I landed up here was coming out of high school I was getting letters from playing sports on D1

level, in terms of high schools, not in college, but, the only reason I ended up here is I was supposed to go to Princeton, or Yale, got letters from them throughout my high school career because of sports. And one of the reasons that I couldn't go, the only reason that I couldn't go actually, good GPA, good class rank, good in sports, was that the school that I went to didn't press, like, ACT, so we didn't have any type of preparation for it, so I took it twice my senior year and made the same score, which was a 19. Which the minimum was a 25 to get in those schools, so that's why I ended up at Marvel University. Second choice, but I grew up a Marvel University fan too.

Right now I'm in grad school, my Master's in education psychology, basically, LPC [licensed professional counselor] route, so professional counseling. Got my undergraduate in psychology and religious studies, I double majored in those two. So it's kind of where my passion lies, in terms of social sciences, in terms of religion, psychology, it's kind of what I'd like to do, so counseling, definitely. In terms of the colleges around the state, it's the only one that I ever really wanted to go to. Also the prestige that it seemed like it had, coming from a senior in high school, to what I thought it was, and it was, very prestigious, it had a commitment to diversity, which is pretty cool. I realized it my freshman year, my whole undergraduate career I realized that it had a commitment to excellence in my opinion. And it had a commitment to having different types of people in class, on campus. And my undergraduate career at least, I think it did a pretty good job at doing that.

My expectations because it's so many different types of people. I mean living in the dorms my freshman year, just seeing different personalities, whether it was just white people that I didn't experience before much, or just living in that type of living situation

was big for me. So I think it did meet that criteria, in terms of being very, what I would call diverse in terms of diverse types of people, it met that criteria, the university did, I think. I was a freshman, I came up here and my roommate my freshman year, we came from the same school, same city. And we come from inner city, so we're urban in that context. And we were debating one day at the residence hall, in the first floor in the computer lab, and we had other friends who had came from a different kind of context, like they came from the suburbs, where we came from the inner city. But we're all sitting here debating, me and my friend that I grew up with, we were just debating politics, like in a decent way, I think, in a good way actually. But we were loud. So the worker who was white, we're Black, he assumed that we were debating in a way that was more ... like it wasn't peaceful, basically. So just different types of culture you can realize how on one end, he was thinking something different, on our end we were just debating.

So he called the police. The police came. It wasn't a huge incident, but they called us out, talked to us, and it was just a big miscommunication based on different types of cultures, different styles of communicating. So that's something that's kinda stuck with me, and we laugh about it now. But just having that kind of visual our freshman year, when we were really just actually debating about something that's productive, but just, it was a culture shock in a way because we're just talking, we yell at each other, we might be loud, and we still talk the same way and argue the same way to this day. But seeing how some people would take things differently because maybe they were Black and were being loud, but were being political in our speech. It was a little different for us, disheartening at the time, we laugh about it now, but at the time it was kind of different. And I think it was even different for my friends who were around us. They were Black

guys as well, most of them, some females too, but what I've learned from that situation was that, no matter the color, you can come from different places. And most of our friends were from the suburbs. We weren't, so just our style of communication was a little bit different.

Some positives experiences are definitely being able to connect with people that do not look like me. Different cultures, different types of people. One of my majors was Religious Studies when I was here. And the richness of going, we were required at times to go to different religious forums . . . there was a Muslim imam which is similar to a Christian pastor, who would speak. We were required to go to events that he spoke at, but he came to our class. We were required to go to a Buddhist forum, same thing with a Jewish forum.

Those types of things for me is what I consider to be wins, because it exposed my mind to things that I didn't necessarily see prior, or I didn't have an opinion on prior, but now I do because of learning about those kind of cultures, those religions, so the diversity within thought I think has been a win for me. It's what I wouldn't change for anything. Being able to see different types of people and how different types of people think and act, and here I think has been a goal, of the university, to create a context in which you can have those types of different things existing all together. So for me that's a win. My mind changed completely since I was a freshman to the end of my undergraduate to even now in terms of what the university's committed towards, and that's what I would consider wins. My mind changed, my mind developed, and I see more holistically than I did.

I'm in graduate school now, so imagine education and professional counseling, and over the last two years, it's between 40 and 50 people who's in this program. I'm the only Black male within that program within the last two years of forty-something people, close to 50, and that is what I would consider a loss, just because of, even though the university has a commitment to diversity, has a commitment to having different types of people at the university, it's a visual to me that it's still not necessarily the case in every context, which I guess you don't expect it to be, but to me that's a loss because, say I'm a Black man, I am a Black man, I offer one opinion of a Black man. Therefore, when I'm speaking in class, I can really only speak from my experience.

What I would prefer, as a Black man, is that the other white people in my class, in my cohort, maybe to get the full spectrum of how a Black man might think. Cause they may hear me and hear that I'm really reasonable with this situation or on this topic, but it may be other Black men on the same topic who'd be more passionate about it, or even flipped, have more passion on this situation and other people might be less passionate. That's a loss in my opinion because I would like the cohort that I'm in, the group that I'm in, to be able to receive more diversity of opinion and thought. So to me that's a loss. So I guess in summation the loss would be the attempt for diversity in actually it happening in a lot of ways, but not happening in every context.

Cloak's Counter-Story: Experiences and Expectations

My name is Cloak. I'm from the east coast of the United States, born and raised. I'm an African American, Black male. I come from a big family. I have 6 sisters, 5 brothers, 6 nieces, and 1 nephew. I've lived with my father my whole life. I've never resided with my mother. I've been around her a lot but I've never lived with her a day in

my life. I was born and raised by my father. I've been running track and field my whole life. It's something that I been interested in. That's something that kept me away from what been going on back at home. That's what basically got me interested into furthering my education. I actually had no idea that I'd be coming to a PWI [predominantly white institution]. I actually was [planning on] going to HBCU in a different state on the east coast. But couple things went wrong. Grades ... And things like that. So I had to attend a junior college for my first two years in college. I had to complete my math course, which was college algebra, to attend a division 1 school.

The one I actually wanted to go to was in a different state in the Midwest, but I needed to get a C or better to get into that conference. I couldn't get that ... I got a D. I was not going to school. I had to take off a semester. I was talking to a couple coaches at a university in a state up north. One day he called me out of nowhere said "How you feel about Marvel University?" I said ... I mean, "What about it?" He was like "You don't sound excited." He was like "I just got the jump coach job there. That's when I got excited about it. I'm like "Okay." He mentioned that he wanted to take me with him. That's how my experience started here. My expectation was a lot of white people, very country, and racist. I thought it would be very racist ... Those stories that I heard from my grandmother, before I even came here ... She's like "You got to be careful. You sure?" She really had doubts of me coming here. She really was, like, skeptical. She did not want me to come here. But, me being the person that I am, I'm like, I'm not going stay out here for my whole life. I'm going go do something different. So basically, I was kind of preparing myself for, like, racism and things like that. That was kind of my perspective before I ever even attended.

I came here as an athlete so, it was kind of ... Half and half. Because I was getting treated good, because being an athlete, you know, they're going to get you what you need. You walk around like the kings of campus, when you're an athlete here. On my last semester, my eligibility was up. I experienced life without track and field. It was different. It was very different. It was more of people being nonchalant. And having to seek help. Help was really given to me when I was on the team. But once I graduated I kinda trickled down into the regular community. It was a little bit tougher. It was tougher.

In one of my classes, I believe I had got ... Not the grade that I wanted in a class. And before then, the counselors would be more than willing to help. Then they would be right there for you. Once I had failed this class and I had went to a counselor, which I was not an athlete no more, and she basically kinda put me on the back burner. She's like "Okay, well I'ma try my best but I have to deal with such and such first" I'm like "Okay, so I'm not a number 1 priority anymore?" That kind of hurt my feelings. I was kinda upset because at first I was. But now that I'm not participating in these activities any more and I'm tryna just, graduate, I got put on the back burner. I had to wait now he was fired and he didn't really wanna be there, because he was like, "There's something going on inside of this school. Inside this athletics program, that I don't agree with and I don't wanna be a part of." And that's what he would tell me. So he would always tell me, like, "Let me know what's going on, so I can help you as best as I could." And I also forgot to mention that when I did – my coach that got me here, who called me and said, "How you feel about the Marvel University?" After that first year, he had been fired so that kinda impacted me also.

I remember when my coach that brought me here got fired. Yeah he got fired because a new jump coach came in. And he told me that he was tryna take me with him. And like I said, the only reason I came here was for him. You feeling me? So when he got fired, he wanted me a job at a university in a southeastern state. He told me he wanted to take me with him. So literally, I tried to get a release. I tried to get released, basically. And the head coach here, being as though he knew my talent, my raw talent in what I had done that first season, he refused to release me.

So basically, I was forced to stay here. That's another reason why I said I was being used. When I realized, "Wow I'm really being used." Like I said, I only had two years there, so it was limited time to be there. So he really didn't release me, he was like, "You're too much of an asset to this team. You're an automatic scorer. I cannot let you go." And I'm looking at him like, "Are you serious? Like, you gone keep me somewhere I don't wanna be? Like, I didn't come here for you. I came here for the person that you just fired." And he did not release me. Like I said, I got tired of going back and forth. And I had to give in because it was a battle I wasn't going to win. So, I winded up staying here. And, yeah that's just an experience of like I said, was me noticing that I was being used.

Night Thrasher's Counter-Story: Experiences and Expectations

My name is Night Thrasher. I am currently a freshman. I came from Avengers City, born and raised. I'm a marketing major, I don't know if I said that. Marketing major and I have two minors in psychology and human relations. I'm an only child. Yeah, I'm really interested in aviation. That's what I'm passionate about. I currently work at the Nike store. I've been there for over three and half years or probably around three and a

half years. Yeah. I'm a big band nerd. I was in band all throughout high school and middle school. I originally was going to choose to go to another university, however, I chose to come here because I want to further my career with Nike. If I would have gone to the other university, I would not have been able to do that. I know that this university also has a pretty good school of business and my major is marketing. That was one thing that attracted me. My family definitely did not want me to come here because from their view, the other university was more of a diverse place. However, I was raised in kind of a predominantly white part of Avengers City. I really didn't feel like that would be too much of an issue for me because it's something that I'd already been around for so long. I just always thought that the city was a pretty cool place. I've been here a couple times for football games and basketball games and things like that. It always just seemed super cool.

Before coming here, I expected to be one of the very few Black people here. Coming here, I really didn't even think that there was going to be as many Black people as there are here today, which is really not even a lot. To get like a quality education too. I expected racism whenever like before coming here, just from talking to cousins and family members who had previously came here. Hearing some of the stories about things that they experienced. Then like, with the SAE [Sigma Alpha Epsilon] thing too. Honestly, I didn't know a lot about Marvel University. SAE thing definitely is something that ... Me like not knowing a lot about Marvel University is definitely something that stood out because that was such a public issue. That was basically one of the only things that I did know about Marvel University at the time. I definitely thought that I would experience microaggressions and racism and things like that. I was kind of uncertain. I

knew that it was a good school that I could hopefully still thrive here. I'm sure that they have a lot of stuff to offer me because if they can offer it to Caucasian people then they can offer it to me too.

My expectation of the things that I would get with going to this university as far as professional development and knowledge, new acquired knowledge, it definitely has met that expectation for me. It's actually surpassed that expectation. I've been involved in a lot of things, which is definitely not something that I thought that I would have done. Not even something that I would have even thought that I would be able to do. Things like being a part of student-led organization and just everything I'm a part of. It definitely has surpassed my expectations for that. It actually has, ironically, met my expectations for feeling microaggressions and maybe some low key forms of racism, just with various things that have happened. Overall, I would say that this university has definitely met all the expectations that I thought that it would. However, with that being said, they're also good at not necessarily providing resources but ... I thought that I would feel more microaggressions and more racism just like apparent racism. Now being here, I really don't. I feel like they hire a lot of professionals and a lot of staff who are very understanding of that. They're very aware of the issue. It just makes the student ... It makes me feel kind of at home because coming in, I really thought that I was going to have racist professors and things like that, which I do hear cases about. All my professors have been the most loving professors.

My professors and most of my fellow classmates have been just really open. I think they're aware that most times I am one of the few, if not the only, African American person in my class. Sometimes, controversial topics will come up. I think that

they're aware of that and they purposely try to make them comfortable for me, which is very comforting. It's not something that I would expect. That was a very positive thing, especially around the time whenever the presidential race and like inauguration and all that stuff. They definitely made me feel comfortable. Most times they did. If they didn't, it wasn't on purpose. It was just them genuinely not being aware. That's a positive thing. Yeah. People here are super positive.

Negative things, I have had a few instances where I feel like they're microaggressions, maybe they're not, maybe I am just tripping. I've had a couple of instances where I've been waiting for an elevator on my floor to go down to the first floor to go to class for the day. Let's say I have in my earbuds or I'm just not paying attention and the elevator closes. I've had multiple times to where another person from my floor, whether it's like east or west, they will just hop on the elevator and quickly press the close button. I don't get the opportunity to get on the elevator or they notice me right there. They know that I'm obviously waiting for the elevator just like they are and they don't catch my attention or they don't simply just hold it up. They just let it shut on it's own whenever they obviously know that we're waiting for the same thing.

That would be a negative thing. Also, a negative thing is, I've been walking around campus late at night, probably around my door, maybe going to my car or something and there's been maybe like two times whenever a couple guys from the Caucasian decent will drive past in their big trucks, just screaming out stuff. Stuff that can't even actually comprehend because I don't know what they're saying. However, I can just tell like it maybe something negative from their tone of voice. That is some negative things. Also, some negative things ... I don't know. I guess it just really depends

on ... I don't want to say everyone at this university because it's definitely not everyone but, there are still the small number of people who do make me feel uncomfortable at times. Maybe if I am the only Black person in a setting, which is actually common, there are people who can make it a little bit uncomfortable.

I work at student media. It is a great place. I love what they do for the campus and what they do for the surrounding community. I do marketing for them and they help out everyone a lot. Usually, if there's any marketing that anyone needs to do, they come to us because we market well, I guess you could say. I definitely admire what they do.

The head manager, she's a white female. The two that are underneath her, one's a white female, one's like a Mexican white female. I really don't know what she is. Then, under them ... The managers under them are also females. One's mixed maybe, I don't know, and another's Asian. There, I am definitely the minority because there is females in that office. A negative experience that I've had ... I've had kind of many. I feel like they throw microaggressions left and right. Honestly, I don't even know if I'd call it microaggressions because maybe they are aware, maybe they're not aware. From where I come from, I've been working at Nike for like three and a half years. I've stayed there because of the leadership, because I know ... Because of Nike, I know what good leadership is and what type of leadership I like. They [the managers at student media] don't offer it.

I can't pin-point a specific interaction but just the way that she makes me feel. I've even talked to my co-worker the way that she makes us feel is completely different than she makes the other countless white females in the office feel. It's definitely different. I feel ... Whenever I talk to my manager, I feel like disrespect. I feel like she's

being a fake nice, sometimes. You can tell whenever someone's being nice to you because basically it's their job or, whenever they're being nice to you because they are genuinely just a nice person. I feel like seeing her interactions with me versus seeing her interactions with others, excluding me and I feel like it's totally different.

There was one time that I was looking for my supervisor because I was actually about to give them my two week notice, plot twist. I was looking for supervisor and she wasn't in the office. My supervisor boss was on her computer, typing. I politely came up behind her and I was like, "Oh hey. Excuse me, can I talk to you for a second?" She was like, "Yeah, what's up?" However, whenever she was like, "Yeah, what's up?" Through the rest of our conversation, she did not acknowledge me. She did not turn around from her computer. I was literally sitting behind her talking to her back. I was just [thinking], "It's kind of really rude and disrespectful to be talking to someone and you're not going to acknowledge them?" It's just little things like that. Whenever she picks ... You need to answer your phone?

She wasn't facing me. In that moment, I felt so like disrespectful ... Not disrespectful, disrespected and belittled. I feel like if someone's talking to you, especially if you're at work and it's one of your employees, even though she's not my direct manager, she's my manager's manager. If it's like an employee and you're working with them, I feel like you should always be respectful no matter what. Yeah, just like I said with my manger being just fake nice, is what it seems. Just seeing how they interact with others. It makes me feel uncomfortable and I do not enjoy the most. That's honestly really my one and only negative interactions I've had with faculty or staff.

Wilson's Counter-Story: Expectations and Experiences

My name is Wilson. I'm from North Avengers City, born and raised. Currently, I'm a junior. Accounting major. This semester I'll be applying for my interning master's program. My expectations were I didn't really know what to expect from college. I just grew up in a normal household. In high school, I really didn't do too much. I just really was very academic-based, focused on getting really good grades. Coming to college, I just kind of was focused on the same thing. Getting here, getting things done. Focusing on my grades. As far as expectations, I really didn't have any. I was just open to whatever would happen when I got here. Just to be completely honest, most classes I walk into I am probably one of the only Black people. It is almost always kind of like a, "Okay, what am I going to do?" If I don't know anyone, it's kind of like, "Okay." It's not awkward at this point, but it's just something that as the minority you always notice. Then if you do see maybe another Black person in class, you're naturally going to migrate towards them. Then that's when other people start noticing, but for you it's natural.

Just the same for them. They don't notice, but if there's 50 white people to one Black person, you're not going to notice that 50 white people are sitting next to each other because they're all white. Just as far as the classwork, that's just something I've always noticed. Usually I'm always one of the only Black people. Then as far as socially, living on campus it's mostly just ... I don't know. That's just something you notice here on campus. It's not that many Black people, but when you see them, it's always like there's something there. My second semester I got involved in a service fraternity called Alpha Phi Omega. Through that, that's when I really branched out, met a lot of people, got involved in the community as far as community service. Got involved on campus

doing things like big events. That's a positive experience. Then being an RA [resident advisor] has been a positive experience. I get to meet a lot of freshmen and just the people I work with. I know in my [residence] center, for sure I'm the only business major, so just working with people from different majors, it just takes you out of the academic part and you get to experience other things with people who are different from you.

I feel like a negative experience for all Black people on this campus was my freshman year when the SAE [Sigma Alpha Epsilon] thing happened. What made it negative, not only that they would say such a thing, that was negative in itself, but what made it even worse is how people turned it around and were like, "Oh, Black people are going to backlash because of what they said." Here, we're the victims, but somehow it's turned around that now we're once again the problem. A negative experience I had with that was I remember one time I was walking back from my car from the store and there were two white guys in front of me. They're both bigger than me. I'm a small person. Both of them are just turning around, keep looking at me like I was going to do something to them, as if I was following them. That was just one negative experience I've had with that situation specifically, other than the situation as a whole. It was just negative how it got turned around on who it was targeted to.

Summary

These twelve counter-stories are first-hand accounts of participants' experiences and expectations in higher education, particularly at an HWI. The themes emerging from the counter-stories are analyzed in the next chapter. The research questions developed in Chapter 1 will guide the thematic analysis**.**

Chapter 5. Findings and Data Analysis

In this chapter, analysis of interview responses and counter-stories will shed light on Black male participants' perceptions of success. The participants' counter-stories, as presented in the previous chapter, are valuable for the following three reasons. First, they show how Black male students' experiences challenge the dominant discourse, in which Black males do not having a voice in defining their success at HWIs. Second, the counter-stories provide insights, from Black males' perspectives, that could inform the development of new higher education policies and actions to support Black male students. Third, the counter-stories shed light on Black males' feelings of belonging and acceptance at HWIs and their perceptions of universities' recruitment and retention efforts.

Theoretical Framework

Three frameworks were used to analyze the counter-stories: critical race theory (CRT), intersectionality, and Prakash and Waks's four conceptions of excellence (1985). These frameworks were chosen as most appropriate based on the dominant discourse of race and gender and their relation to the experiences of Black males at historically white institutions. These theories were discussed in detail in Chapter 2; below is a brief summary of each one, followed by an analysis of the themes emerging from the counter-stories.

Critical Race Theory

This framework functions in my study to provide "basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in

and out of the classroom" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25). CRT scholars address the dominant positions that race and power have in education (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Tierney, 1993). Using CRT, Daniel Solórzano and Tarra Yosso take a critical approach to their research on campus racial climate. Similarly, the CRT model allows me to look through a critical lens to pose questions about equity in education.

The "basic CRT model consists of five elements focusing on: (a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the trans-disciplinary perspective" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 22). From this framework, we can intentionally address the intersections of race, class, and gender while simultaneously addressing traditional paradigms (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000) such as classroom settings, administrative factors, institutional climate, and student success measures for Black males at HWIs. This framework addresses the historical context that affects how racism influences and shapes some of the structures of higher education today.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) can be defined as the "relationships among multiple social dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). Understanding how these multiple identities intersect therefore provides a more holistic understanding of individuals and their experiences (Museus & Griffin, 2011). Intentionally for this study, I will use intersectionality to provide a framework that analyzes on a micro level to reveal the intersections of multiple identities and on a macro level to investigate structural and political systems. "Structural

intersectionality" refers to how multiple social systems interact to shape individuals' experiences, especially their experiences of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). In higher education, an example of structural intersectionality is the shaping of Black male experiences at HWIs through the combination of sexual orientation and racial inequalities (Crenshaw, 1991; Museus & Griffin, 2011). "Political intersectionality" refers to "how the multiple social groups to which an individual belongs pursue different political agendas, which can function to silence the voices of those who are at the intersection of those social groups" (Museus & Griffin, 2011, p. 7). For example, political intersectionality is at play when Black males refuse to address discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students of color to avoid having these issues made public and "risking tainting the image of those communities of color" (Museus & Griffin, 2011, p. 7).

Four Conceptions of Excellence

Prakash and Waks (1985) define the four conceptions as "the technical, the rational, the personal, and the social" and describe the standards of educational excellence associated with each (p. 79); these are operationalized (respectively) as mental proficiency, disciplinary initiation, self-actualization, and social responsibility.

Findings

The next section consists of an analysis of the counter-stories and interview responses. The participants' responses and the theoretical frameworks are used to answer each of the research questions. As noted in Chapter 3, using a thematic analysis approach as a tool for analysis has been shown to be consistent with the kind of methodologies and theoretical frameworks used in this study. Table 5.1, below, highlights the dominant

themes and counter-themes that emerged from participants' data. The data is organized into dominant narratives and counter-stories. I define master or dominant narrative as curriculum masterfully geared to preserve whiteness, white supremacy, and white ideology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Woodson, 2015), producing storylines that completely ignore non-dominant groups. Woodson (2002) provide a more precise definition of master narrative and draws from Howard to define counter-story: "Master narrative is defined as the social mythologies that mute, erase, and neutralize features of racial struggle in ways that reinforce ideologies of White supremacy" (King & Swartz, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Woodson, 2015, p. 2). By contrast, Howard defines counter-stories as "narratives that convey "struggles . . . often overlooked by those in positions of power," and that draw "explicitly" on the experiential knowledge of those silenced in education research (2008, p. 964). In the critical race framework, counter-stories are used to challenge master narratives and strengthen traditions of resistance (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Dominant themes	Counter-themes
It's all about the academics. (5 participants) College success means earning good grades and receiving a degree. That's all there is to it.	**Work twice as hard** (9 participants) We Black students face more barriers to academic success than white students do. White students have more informal connections to professors, and white fraternities have a long history of maintaining test files to help with studying; our (Black) fraternities typically don't have this advantage.
Paper equals paper – Degree attainment (9 participants) A college degree puts us Black graduates on an equal footing. Once we have the degree, we're equal to everyone else in the competition for jobs or graduate school admissions.	**Race is a hindrance at an HWI** (2 participants) Being Black isn't a hindrance for me, but my being Black is a "problem" for the HWI that I attend.
The college experience – It's all fun and games until . . . . (9 participants) Having a full and successful college experience means trying out new experiences, having fun, and still earning good enough grades to earn a degree. It's the whole package.	**Community – We all we got** (8 participants) We're held to a higher standard. We're not expected to succeed, and when we do, white people think, "oh, he probably cheated his way through college." But the Black community understands how it really is. We give each other more credit for our achievements, and this speaks well of our community.
Access to the institution – Now that I'm here (8 participants) Just being in college here is an indication of our success. But it's not enough. We need to be involved in everything. We need Black leaders in student government and Black members of prestigious clubs. We need to show that we can be successful in every part of the traditional campus life.	**Representation – Be seen but not heard** (7 participants) They say they want more Black male students. For that to happen, it's important for us to have places and activities on campus that are just for us, like the Black Males Initiative. This is how we can support each other. But when we get noticed, they tell us we're not being inclusive and they shut us down – even though many of us wouldn't be here at all if it weren't for Black-centered initiatives.
Prestige (11 participants) Society tells us what a successful person is: someone who has a college degree and a good job. These are the most important milestones. And if you don't achieve these things, you're a loser.	**Holistic success** (2 participants) Success isn't just about earning a degree or getting a good job. It's about feeling passionate about your goals, whatever they are, and about thinking deeply and learning from every interaction.

Table 5.1. Summary of dominant themes and counter-themes that emerged from the counter-stories.

Research Question 1: How do Black male collegians conceptualize success?

Co-researchers frame their general conceptions of success around degree attainment and GPA. When discussing these metrics, their responses are rather vague, lacking in detail. However, when asked more specifically about how they conceptualize success as a Black male student, they mentioned high achievement (such as college leadership, engagement beyond the classroom, internships, and community involvement,) post-college success (financial freedom, career advancement, and family stability), and holistic success[12] (which includes emotional and spiritual aspects, among others).

The co-researchers' responses fall into two categories, each of which includes several themes. The first category consists of master or dominant narratives and discourses that reflect the dominant view of success, in response to the question "how do you define success?" The second category consists of the counter-stories that disrupt the master narratives, in response to the question "How does being Black matter to your definition of student success?" The following themes fall under the dominant narrative: a) *It's all about the academics*; b) *Paper equals paper – Degree attainment;* c) *College experience – It's all fun and games until… (d) Access to the institution – Now that I'm here;* and e) *Prestige.* The counter-stories, on the other hand, comprise the following themes: a) *Work twice as hard;* b) *Race as hindrance at an HWI;* c) *Community – We all*

[12] With regard to holistic success, I draw Joe Cuseo's (2007) "*Student Success: Definition, Outcomes, Principles and Practices.*" In his conception, students develop as "whole persons" as they progress through and complete their college experience. This outcome consists of multiple dimensions. This holistic aspect of student success is consistent with recent research and interest in such concepts as multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1999), emotional intelligence or EQ (1995), and spiritual intelligence (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). It is also consistent with the vast majority of college mission statements and institutional goals, which include many outcomes that are not strictly academic or cognitive in nature (Astin, 1991; Kuh, Shedd, & Whitt, 1987).

we got; d) *Representation – Be seen but not heard;* and e) *Holistic success.* In addition to summarizing these themes, Table 5.1 shows the number of participants whose stories reflected each theme.

Co-researchers reinforced the dominant narrative of student success when asked "how do you define student success?" This should not come as a surprise, as Black males benefit from patriarchy and capitalism. Both of these systems play a role in unearned privilege and the normalizing of capitalistic gain. These structures are in place to continue dominance over other marginalized groups in subtle but harmful ways. Black males, particularly cisgender-performing males, accrue privilege through gender, yet they also are marginalized by race. So it is not surprising that we see a contrast between dominant narratives and the counter-stories that challenge them. In addition to these contradictions, I also highlight the institution's colonializing role not only in reinforcing the dominant view of success, but also in undermining Black males' success. The institution claims to place value on attracting and retaining Black male students, but mainly to advance the institution's own interests, often to bolster athletics or to promote the appearance of diversity. This is known as interest convergence. According to Bell (1980), "The interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 523). By contrast, the co-researchers' conceptions of success from a Black perspective reveals that their access to the university is compromised by hyper-surveillance and the idea of "be seen and not heard." The excerpts below illustrate how each theme is substantiated by the co-researchers' stories.

Master Narrative: It's all about the academics
(reflected in 5 participants' stories)

Wilson: I think being a student is made up of a lot of things when it's academically. First, what we're here to do is get a degree. I think success comes from one, just excelling academically.

Bishop: I define student success as definitely academically, so your grades, the opportunities that you get while you are here, internships, stuff like that. I definitely say academically and internship-wise, that student ...that has a lot to do with student success in my opinion.

But when I asked them how they defined student success as a Black man, different themes emerged.

Counter-story: Work twice as hard
(reflected in 9 participants' stories)

Wilson: Like I was saying earlier, I feel like when you're Black and you're almost successful, people think that it was almost a handout. For me, I feel like it means I have to work 10 times harder than the next person to be half as successful. That's almost kind of like a cliché, but it's so true. I have to do so much more just to get to the next or to almost compared to my white counterpart. Being Black and being successful to me means working just 10 times harder than the next person just to prove that I'm just as good as them.

Bishop: Being Black matters to the definition of my success because being at a PWI ...the advantages aren't on our side technically. I've known guys who have test files, they pretty much have the test before they take the test. Like with IFC [Interfraternity Council] and PAN [Panhellenic Association]. In PHC or NGC they don't have that kind of access. Just being Black, it's tougher on us to be successful than it is for them. Just like I said with the test files and then so and so's brother in IFC is the professor for this class so they always find a way to tweak it to make sure that they have what they need to have for the test but we don't have that access. We actually have to bust our butts and if we want that same information we are going to have to go to office hours. Our resources aren't as ... we don't have as many resources as others do. When you come out on top as an African American or Black it would ... it definitely feels better than it would for a white person, if that makes sense.

Master Narrative: Degree attainment – Paper equals paper
(reflected in 9 participants' stories)

Blade: We all come to college to graduate and get a job. The rest of the definition when it comes to being accepted and being able to do well with what you have comes from my experiences with the loans and all the different organizations. I

have to be comfortable in my own skin, and I know that in order to be successful, it would have helped a lot more if I was accepted in the different organizations, but even though I wasn't involved as much in the beginning, I still pushed, and I still know that my end goal is to graduate. I know that we're all going to get there eventually, no matter how much time it's going to take.

Counter-story: Race as hindrance at an HWI
(reflected in 2 participants' stories)

Blade: Being Black matters in my definition of success because that's the life that I'm living. I don't get to choose this life. I know that me being Black isn't a hindrance to me. It's a hindrance to the rest of the people in the world. They see that my Blackness is a problem for them. For me, it's not. Being Black gives me ... I guess it's instilled in me a sense of individualism and a desire to want to get to where I want to be, which is in the end graduating and having a job.

Master Narrative: College experience – It's all fun and games until…
(reflected in 9 participants' stories)

Cloak: Student success to me is embracing your college experience. Being able to have fun, and get business done at the same time. And at the end of the day, maintain a level of ... The level of achievement which you still are able to get A's and B's, with a couple of C's. And still be able to graduate.

Counter-story: Community – We all we got
(reflected in 8 participants' stories)

Cloak: Well, being Black matters to my student success because I feel like we were held to a higher standard. I think it means much more to the Black community to be successful in a white PWI. Because we are expected not to graduate from PWIs. We are expected not to be able to keep up in the classroom. We're said to not be as smart as white males and females. Black success is a big thing because ... I don't know, like I said, in my opinion, it really – once we do achieve the goals that we had set for ourselves, it's like, more of a accomplishment to us than anybody else. So to our own kind, you know what I'm saying? Because even though we do graduate, and do complete college, like I said, white people, white males or females, they still look at us like, "Oh he probably cheated his way through or he probably did this and that." But in the Black community, we know what it really is. And, like I said, we able to give ourselves more credit than anybody else will be able to. So I think it just speaks more on our community.

Master Narrative: Access to the institution: Now that I'm here
(reflected in 8 participants' stories)

Isaiah Bradley: Student success, I don't know, based on statistically, I would say getting here is a student success. Graduating is a student success. But I feel like we should hold ourselves to a higher standard than that. I don't think that just coming here and graduating is enough. I think we need to interact. I think we need to break into those molds of like how now we have a Black student government president. Now we have a vice president. We need to break into those prestigious clubs, into the areas that we wouldn't necessary touch, through student success. I think student success is being a leader. Not necessarily being a leader but like being involved in not only your community but other communities.

Counter-story: Representation – Be seen but not heard
(reflected in 7 participants' stories)

Isaiah Bradley: It was a problem when we started making noise. When we started being leaders on campus. "Things around Black Males Initiative this, and Black Males Initiative that," when you hear it, it's a problem because it's not inclusive. Trust me, we have Hispanics on our board. It's not the fact that we're not inclusive but we're specifically here for African-American males. If you want accountability and things like that, by all means, please come join our organization 'cause it's there, but our main mission is for us and that's what the conferences were created to do. I just think it's crazy that they would just take it away and kind of make it into what they feel like we needed. We still have control over it but now they forcing things that we have to do like change the name to make it inclusive. Back then, Black Males Initiative is how my class, 90 percent of us got to Marvel University. Like, without that, coming to those conferences, nobody in my class had the credentials and there was two other kids that had the credentials to actually get in, that met the qualifications. At that time that was the only way we got here so if it wasn't for Black Males Initiative, we wouldn't be here.

Master Narrative: Prestige
(reflected in 11 participants' stories)

Miles Morales: I think success is very relative. Getting to Marvel University and graduating from Marvel University are two different things. Some people may look at me and say, "Well, you were pre-med and now you're not a doctor, so that's a failure." In a certain sense, sure, that was a goal, and I didn't meet it, so that's a failure. Other people may say, "You came to Marvel University and you graduated and you got a Master's degree. You're a home run." That's another way to look at it, so I think it's relative. For me, if I described it, I would definitely say getting into college, graduating from college, and pursuing a Master's degree, a Ph.D., or going into the field that you sought after, I think those would be very broad-based levels of success, student success. I think, for one, it's a basic litmus test of society. If you define someone as successful, or going places in their life, or doing something with their life, they are college educated, they have a great job, and they've just done some of the "basic

milestones" that society says you do this, you do this, you're a success. You're not a loser, you're not a nobody.

Counter-story: Holistic success
(reflected in 2 participants' stories)

Miles Morales: I'm 28 years old now, where I think I move towards more things that I'm passionate about. Sure, money and things like that, are a part of it, a big part of it, but more and more I want to really be happy in what I'm doing versus anything else.

Black Goliath: So student success for me right now is having my mind molded in a way that's changed from every interaction that I have in class, every instructor that I connect with. It's not necessarily a necessity to network with them that I have now, but it's a necessity to learn from them, and learn from their style of thinking, so what it was previously was a more, I would call a dogmatic style of learning, a more traditional form, learn information. That's not at all what I consider student success now. It's a part of it and it's needed for initial, younger purposes, but now my idea of student success is being able to think in a way that's critical of yourself, critical of other people, in a way that, no matter what situation you find yourself in, in terms of work in the future career-wise, you can think your way out of it, because you can think holistically.

Research Question 2: What experiences socialize Black men to their definitions of success?

Co-researchers identified similar socializing experiences before higher education and during their collegiate career. Two central themes and three subthemes emerged regarding socialization toward conceptions of success.

John Henryism. The first central theme is known as John Henryism, a mechanism of active coping to control the behavioral stressors of the environment through hard work and determination (James et al., 1984). James (1994) provides a brief summary of the folklore of John Henry:

> John Henry, the steel-driving man, was known far and wide among late 19th century railroad and tunnel workers . . . for the remarkable physical strength and endurance he dis-played in his work. It was at the mouth of the Big Bend tunnel in West Virginia, in the early 1870s, so the story goes . . . that John Henry beat a mechanical steam drill in a famous "steel-driving" contest pitting "man against machine." The race was extremely close throughout but, with a series of powerful

> blows from his 9lb hammer in the closing seconds of the race, John Henry emerged the victor. Moments after the contest ended, however, John Henry dropped dead from complete physical and mental exhaustion." (p. 167)

John Henryism is a phenomenon well established in the literature on psychosocial factors and cardiovascular disease risk (e.g., Syme et al., 1964; Harburg et al., 1973a, b; Haynes et al., 1978; Brody, 1980; Harrell, 1980; Marmot, 1983; Kasl, 1984; Tyroler, 1984). Although this study's findings do not focus on physical health, the comparisons are similar in the interview responses.

The co-researchers' experiences regarding student success confirmed how they adjust to their institutions' definitions of success. The co-researchers' understanding of success was framed around upbringing, family expectations, and societal influences, and John Henryism is one of the responses they employed to cope with these conceptions of success. The following excerpts provide insight into Black males' coping strategies, which also function as socialization techniques at HWIs.

> Nick Fury: You have to want it. You have to really want it to be here and it's not only be here, but you have to want to be successful yourself. Very few people at the university that you meet can provide you with the resources that you need. You have to take advantage of every resource given to you, every organization that is given to you. Look up people of color that are here, went through the same stuff you're going through. If you struggle, reach out to them. Don't sit back and try not to reach out and swallow your pride. You have to try to give back to them and you have to speak your mind. You have to work ten times harder than a white person is gonna have to work, because you have that chip on your shoulder, as an African American.

> Isaiah Bradley: Man, you gotta be a dog, pretty much. It's like, come in with your armor on. Every day you should be thinking of something big, I feel like. I think your goal should be always on your mind, always in the back of your head because for us some of the situations you go through can be so detrimental that we can lose sight of why we're here and then completely fall off. So I say, keep your dreams close. Keep it close to your heart. Don't give up. Seek a mentor. I think I have like 12 mentors. Seek as many plugs [connections] and as many different fields, as many different positions as you think of 'cause you never know

> who they know and how their position can impact you and change the trajectory of your career goals. I think that's the biggest one.
>
> Blade: Make sure that you go to an event that's structured for your success, because going to an event, or talking to somebody who is a Black faculty member, will give you the first steps that you need to actually get to the resources where you need to be and succeed overall in college. It's like getting your feet wet.

Manhood and Masculinity. The second central theme is manhood and masculinity. Boyhood and manhood teachings shape how Black males think about success (Dancy, 2012). Dancy's *The Brother Code* (2012) discusses three broad elements of manhood that he encountered in his research about African American males: *self-expectations, relationships and responsibilities to family*, and *worldviews and life philosophies*. *Self-expectations* reflects statements of self-determinism and answerability. *Relationships and responsibilities to family* comprises statements that position African American college men as patriarchs, sons, and brothers. *Worldviews and life philosophies* expresses beliefs about others. In this study, the co-researchers continuously set expectations for themselves and attributed to family members their ability to maintain a sense of determination despite the unfair conditions. For example, Luke Cage's response exhibits broad elements of manhood, specifically *self-expectations* and *relationships and responsibilities to family*. In the following excerpt, Luke Cage discusses what he perceives as a win or loss at the institution he attends, framing wins and losses in the language of competition, which is a gendered behavior encouraged for males in our society.

> Luke Cage: To me, a win here is just like to be able to stay here and keep moving forward and just stay positive while doing it. Pretty much a loss for me, like I said, is just to give up and quit. Especially a lot during the first semester, I didn't know what I was doing. I just wanted to go home. I was like, I'm broke. I don't get it. I'm struggling. I don't want to be here no more. I hate this, but I stuck with

> it and I made it through, because my whole reason for coming here was because I came from a high school where a lot of the kids either don't graduate, go to jail, or don't go to college. If they do go to college, they go to a small school. I wanted to show them that you can get into somewhere big and you don't have to be the smartest one, you don't have to be the most charismatic. You can just be normal and you can get into somewhere that you really want to go. I'm not the first person from my high school to go here. I'm the third. The first one, she was really smart, super smart. She didn't make a lot of friends because she was really smart. The second one, he had the best people skills. He wasn't the brightest, but he had the best people skills. I had neither one of them. I got what I got and I made it, and so I just wanted to show them that you can do it too. You don't have to be just super outstanding to get to somewhere you want to go, I guess.

Isaiah Bradley responses reflects *worldview and life philosophies* from elements of manhood and mentions the importance of Black men's representation in high positions. It is important to note that Isaiah Bradley does not make reference to Black women or any other identities as representation. This supports the notion that Black males collegians seldom acknowledge Black women in high positions as representation by gender.

> Isaiah Bradley: I think the work that office of diversity affairs; what they're doing is positive. I don't like it fast enough for the audience, how fast they want it but I know, just from working there, people are working. They're trying. I think that's a win. And just to see having a African American be a vice president of the university, it's like we don't get to see that. We see the rappers, we see the people on TV. It's like people in all these high positions, like we see a person of color got moved to Associate Dean. These are things that we don't think about before coming to college. We don't see anybody in those areas. I think those are somewhat wins, in that regard.

Subthemes. Participants also confirmed multilayered conceptions of success as the influences on their conceptualizations of success emerged. The first is *upbringing*; from participants' responses when asked about the experiences and childhood memories informing their definition of success, it appears that upbringing had a very large influence. The second influence is the experiences and *expectations* of parents or family members. Third were *social influences*: the influences of society, mostly by the media

and other social expectations. Additionally, from what emerged as a whole, we see increased elements of the *resilience effect,* or, as mentioned earlier, John Henryism. Co-researchers remained encouraged to pursue success, mostly through degree attainment, despite racialized, traumatic, and marginalizing experiences.

As mentioned earlier, *upbringing, family expectations, and social influences* were themes that emerged from co-researchers' responses. *Upbringing* refers to the lessons and early training that parents and guardians impart when rearing children. *Family expectations/influences* includes, but is not limited to, family socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, parental levels of education, family residence, parental encouragement, peer encouragement, and quality of high school. Alexander, Entwisle, and Bedinger (1994) have suggested that parents' ability to form accurate beliefs and expectations regarding their children's performance are essential in structuring the home and educational environment in a way that leads their children to excel in post-school endeavors. I draw from Rashotte (2007) when defining *societal influences*. "Social influence is defined as change in an individual's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behaviors that results from interaction with another individual or a group" (p. 4427). My own definition changes Rashotte's slightly, to place emphasis on the influence of people other than family members: Societal influence is a change in an individual's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behaviors that results from interaction with people outside the individual's family. This definition is changed slightly because of the relationship the individual has with society.

Upbringing

Luke Cage: Yeah. Okay, so my mama, when she was 17 ... She had me when she was 14, so when she was 17, she was working at this nursing home. She was really unhappy, but they've had it good enough at the time to where she could take care of me and she could take care of herself without needing anybody's help. Then this lady, this older lady, she came in and she talked to my mama. I was there actually, and she told her pretty much, like, "If you really hate this, just leave." My mama was telling her, like, "I can't leave because I got to take care of my child. I got to be able to feed him." She was like, "You're never going to last if you're not happy." My mama kept telling her, "I don't have no high school diploma. It's hard for me to get a job." She was like, "A diploma don't define you. Your education is as much as you want it to be like. Just because you don't have that piece of paper doesn't mean you aren't qualified." With that, my mama, she did leave. She went to a different healthcare facility and they paid her less, but eventually, she got moved up because she worked hard and she was able to find out what she was good at. She still works there today. She's right under the direct person there. It just showed me that as you long as you do what you love and be happy, that you can get anywhere.

Family expectations

Blade: My parents instilled in me a work ethic that no matter who's around you, who's trying to stop you, you still have to get it for yourself, and you have to work for what you want. My parents, they weren't racist, but close enough to it. They said things like, "The white man isn't here to help you. You need to make sure that you understand the information, and you need to make sure you need to do whatever you have to do, whether it's pestering the teacher, or whether it's going to tutoring, or going the extra mile to be successful, because nobody's going to hold their hand out and drag you along with them. You have to get it for yourself."

War Machine: My parents and grandparents, they didn't send me here to fail and I had so many expectations, and the pressure to succeed, it was kind of overwhelming me, but once I prayed about it and talked to my grandma about it… You know grandmas always give you the little extra boost that you need, so after doing that and I felt a peace come over me, so I knew that regardless that I'd have to do what I could.

Social influences

Nick Fury: Coming from a PWI high school, was a lot more tougher than coming from an all Black school, because of the fact that you don't have a lot of people, your education is probably a little bit more higher, more stricter than it would be at an African American school. So high school for me it was a lot tougher, but it also allowed me to educate myself and develop not only intellectually, but as a character to surround myself with those that don't look like me, than to get put into a comfort zone of people that look like me to give me that same feeling.

> Okay, this is a best of both worlds type. You got your school full of international, your white people, your not as many minorities and you got your school of minorities that dominate the whole school that aren't as educated as I was coming from a white institution high school.

Research Question 3: How do these students perceive institutional conceptions of success?

The third question examines how Black males perceive institutional conceptions of success, including what support Black males believe will enhance student success. Addressing this question gives voice to Black male students and also potentially enables the institution to improve its educational and social support systems. Responses focused on the four conceptions of success, interest convergence, and colonialism. The co-researchers' collective experiences speak to the larger context of education in society. The U.S. system of education is part of a breeding ground for white supremacy and oppression, and the co-researchers repeatedly expressed the feeling of being at the university and yet not being accepted for their authentic selves. This reflects the colonial nature of higher education at PWIs. As colonial systems develop, they erase the suffering they causeand protect whiteness not only to maintain white power but to reinforce the master narrative: white is good and anything that deviates from whiteness is bad. An institution steeped in colonial values reinforces colonial ways of knowing and stymies critical thinking to prioritize the protection of its own reputation. This has historically been the legacy of HWIs. Until the 1840s, higher education was highly localized and available only to the wealthy. The first Blacks arrived as slaves in the North American colonies in 1619. By the middle of the nineteenth century, 4.5 million Blacks lived in the United States. The earliest education given to them was by missionaries to convert them to Christianity.

With this in mind, the counter-stories and responses were analyzed and the following recurring subthemes emerged: a) measurement and meritocracy; b) sense of belonging and lack of support; and c) capitalism, racism, and lack of institutional responsibility.

Measurement and meritocracy. Most of the co-researchers were quick to express the institution's conception of student success, focusing strongly on degree attainment, GPA, and college rankings. Even if some of the co-researchers do not support these forms of success, it is clear that the focus on degrees and grades has influenced all of the co-researchers and affected their experiences at the institution. These experiences relate to the concept of delayed gratification: receiving a degree purportedly will provide the student the opportunity to make more money or increase social mobility after graduation. Despite the potential increase in earnings potential, however, we cannot overlook the penalty that people of color face as a result of obtaining a degree. This is complicated by race, class, gender, and orientation, and Blacks are more likely than whites to face emotional and psychological stress as result of student success, job success, or financial success (Cole & Omari, 2003). In many cases, people react to such stress by believing that something better is waiting for them if they get through it. The responses also reveal that the co-researchers frame institutional definitions of success heavily around measurement; this corresponds to the first conception of excellence (Prakash and Waks, 1985), which is known as mental proficiency. Mental proficiency is measureable and traditionally quantifiable; it is observable in classrooms, educational activities, and learning outcomes. At this level, "[k]nowledge is viewed as the possession in memory of information" (Prakash & Waks, 1985, p. 81), and the education curriculum

is highly influenced by the need to assess. In their success metrics, institutions of higher education rely heavily on this concept in their use of GPAs, tests, evaluations, and graduation rates. Beyond the definition of mental proficiency, the co-researchers do conceptualize the institutional ideals of success, but this is not the only way that they conceptualize success. Co-researchers also have more in-depth conceptions of success than the institution they attend. I provide a critique of this in Chapter 6.

The co-researchers clearly understand the institution's stance on success, and some appear to accept it. The following excerpts express differences between how the institution defines success and how participants do.

> Nick Fury: Their definition of success is they're all about money and as long as you have 2.0 GPA you can stay here. As long as you're paying for this school, they're gonna allow you to be here. They don't really care whether or not you succeed. They just know as long as they're getting their money, they don't care about you.
>
> Miles Morales: U.S. News and World Rankings is the mecca of college rankings. Every college in the world, especially in the U.S., go off these numbers, and it's very cyclical.

Sense of belonging and lack of support. The research distinctly frames sense of belonging with perceived social support and a feeling of connectedness (Strayhorn, 2012). Black males' perceptions are undervalued, even silenced and often seem invisible at HWIs. The fact that Black males lack a sense of belonging at HWIs reflects the institution's ambivalent stance toward Black male students. On the one hand, HWIs express their interest in attracting and retaining Black male students, but they fail to provide the requisite resources to help them feel welcome and promote their success. This recalls Derrick Bell's discussion of interest convergence in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. The principle of interest convergence can be summarized as follows.

> The interest of Blacks (and other minorities) in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interest of Whites. However, the Fourteenth Amendment, standing alone, will not authorize a judicial remedy providing effective racial equality for Blacks where the remedy sought threatens the superior societal status of middle and upper class Whites." (Bell Jr., 1980, p. 523)

Black males and other marginalized groups should have not only have access to higher education at HWIs but also support resources that will benefit them beyond degree attainment.

The excerpts below expose co-researchers' perceptions of how the institution feels about them as Black males, and about their success.

> Luke Cage: A diploma. Yeah, I mean, that's it. If you don't graduate with a diploma, then nothing else matters.
>
> Blade: The institution defines success on ... I would assume, I don't have much knowledge in this, but I would assume that they define success on the number of graduates and the amount of money that they make at the end of each financial year. The university is a business. What they want to do is make sure that they're making money, make sure that they're being successful, making sure that they can bring in more people to bring in more money so that they can be successful. I think that this whole diversity initiative is great. It's great for the campus, it's great for them so that they get more publicity on bringing in more African American students, so that they can get more money.
>
> Nick Fury: So around that, the institution doesn't really care for you like they try to make it seem like they do. You're pretty much on your own and the only way you can survive in a school like this is to build connections, build mentors, have a solid backbone to help you out and support you. Have friends that wanna help you. Surround yourself with those that wanna succeed just like you. The institution does not care if you succeed, whether or not, they don't care, whatsoever.
>
> Bishop: Getting your degree at this university. That's all I really hear was get your degree at the Marvel University. You can be involved, you can do this and

> that, but at the end of the day everyone is here for one thing, that's to get their degree. I would definitely say getting their degree.

Capitalism, racism, and lack of institutional responsibility. Throughout its history, U.S. higher education has always been a double-edged sword. Education creates opportunities for those who have access but denies those same opportunities to those who need it most, such as people of color, women, and other marginalized groups. As expressed in the excerpts below, co-researchers' responses about the institution's conceptions of success reflect the constant reinforcement of a hegemonic system based on race, class, and gender supremacy.

> Luke Cage: Well, that's how they make their money. That's what I think it is. That's how they make their money. While for me, I don't believe that I need a degree to be successful. I mean, I do personally because the route I want to take in life is going to require me to have one, but just because I don't believe you need one to be successful, here it's going to enforce that you need one and that you can keep paying them to get one, because that's how they live.

> Blade: Really, I think it's all rooted in money and the graduates, because the graduates come into play because if you're not graduating people, you're not going to have people coming here. If you're not having people go out, become alumni, and have great jobs, and have connections for later, you're not going to have many people coming to the Marvel University. In order to be successful for them, it's going to be having people graduate, and having people give money, and having them make money based off the people that they bring in and their future successes.

> Miles Morales: Now let's say the college of arts and sciences had a rock star year, the college of architecture had a rock star year, graduated a ton of students, they all did well, they all went to work for high-paying jobs or went into high-paying professions for high-paying companies. All those pieces of the university in turn makes this institution look better. That in turn goes back to the U.S. News and World Rankings. Let's say this institution moves up a few spots, okay, jumps 10 spots. Well, that in turn attracts more students to this institution, to apply to come to this institution, and the higher the ranking you're getting, the more academically sound students, which brings in more scholarship money, more grant money, more national merits; X, Y, Z, which all pours back into making this institution a stronger school.

Theoretical Analysis

Critical race theory analysis. The challenge to the dominant ideology, which is rooted in race and racism, is one of CRT's five elements (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In higher education and in society, success is framed in capitalistic ways. This frame is supported by the monetary value that society places on receiving a degree. Degree attainment is highly correlated with upward mobility, and upward mobility is enhanced by social and cultural capital. Wilson and many other co-researchers express a dominant ideology of student success focused on the importance of academics, but they also express a counter-narrative. When colleges and universities marginalize Black males in ways that force them to work harder than others, they become less likely to receive a degree. In this situation, the institution itself essentially becomes an obstacle to Black males' success, at least in the Prakash and Waks sense of "success," as they define the most commonly used meaning of excellence as being technical or measurable. This points to the need for institutions to be knowledgeable about their student demographics, student histories, and student contexts. As more students of color gain access to HWIs, multicultural competence among administrators becomes increasingly important. Credle and Dean's (1991) research characterizes the institutional barriers that keep the HWI campus from being a place where African American students can persist. In paraphrasing Credle and Dean, Harmon (2013) characterizes these barriers as follows:

> a) lack of orientation toward the culture of Black students; (b) lack of awareness of the needs of Black students; (c) the inability to respond to the needs of Black

> students; (d) inappropriate academic standards for Black students; (e) inability to help Black students survive in the complex systems of the institution; and (f) negative attitudes toward Black students by white faculty, staff, and administrators. (p. 5)

With all of these obstacles in the path of Black males, support from administrators and various units on campus is necessary to increase opportunities for success. Jones & Williams (2006) note that an "insensitive campus environment that does not openly value the distinct cultures of minority students can stifle these students' emotional and educational development, placing them at risk of leaving college early without a degree" (p. 28). As these students gain their degree, they are doing so at an institution that often fails to provide the necessary resources and support for them to be successful. State flagship institutions, plagued with issues of privilege and racism, are HWIs whose environments may not always be the most comfortable for Black males and students from other marginalized groups, and that may decrease their likelihood of gaining social and cultural capital.

In his comprehensive assessment of the origins and uses of social capital, Portes (1998) noted that social capital is acquired through an individual's relationships with others, particularly through membership in social networks and other social structures (p. 488). Social capital can be vital in the lives of students, particularly students of color, by helping them learn how to navigate the institution and acclimate to university life. Students from marginalized groups should not have to work twice as hard as others to obtain a degree that is highly marketed as a ticket to upward mobility.

Intersectionality analysis. The co-researchers used masculinity as the basis for some of their coping responses; it clear that they hardly acknowledged other ways to be intersectional when using other identities (orientation, religion, class, and sex). It should also be noted that the participants' definitions of success exhibit traditional masculine values. According to the co-researchers, achieving success is vital and is motivated by a "prove them wrong mentality" (Fries- Britt, 1997; Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003). The influences identified by the co-researchers have affected them during their years at the university.

As I analyzed the co-researchers' stories, it was evident to me that many of their responses reflected patriarchal and homophobic values. They tended to view success through the lenses of race and class, but seldom through the lens of gender. The analysis indicated that how these men typically conceptualize success in material terms. In Dancy's *The Brother Code* (2012), he discusses how masculinity is framed in a way that marginalizes women through gender and marginalizes same-gender loving people through homophobia. Moreover, the majority of the co researchers ignored or minimized homosexuality in the data. Unless I mentioned it, the topic of same-gender loving people was absent. When co-researchers mentioned Black women, the rhetoric generally focused on mothering or on sexual or romantic desire. This would be the case with Miles Morales, as throughout his interview, he frequently associated women as acquisition or conquest, and property. As Miles was discussing his experiences at Marvel University, he mentioned this:

> Miles Morales: When I talk about social, you're talking about being young early 20 males, you're looking at women. We're thinking, okay, what's the pecking order as far as what type of guys are the women going to go for? From my lens, it was top dog were the student athletes. When I say student athletes, football

> players. They had first pick of the litter. Whatever girl they wanted, they had first right of refusal. Then you break it down further. Football player, okay, do they have a car or not? Okay, that's another thing. Do they start on the team or not? Are they the quarterback, star running back, receiver, whoever? There's that pecking order within that hierarchy.

His position situates Miles as being the oppressor while explaining his experiences as being oppressed. Essentially, Miles Morales acknowledgement of women is directly rooted in Black patriarchy, which advances white patriarchy on one hand and yet as related to being a Black male suffers from white supremacy on the other. Miles and many others including me are guilty of doing the work of whiteness; several if not all co-researchers fall into this category.

Throughout the interviews, co-researchers expressed ways of coping (elements of manhood and John Henryism) while obtaining a degree. The need for Black students at HWIs to develop coping strategies is not a new phenomenon; students have long dealt with racism (Harper, 2012) as well as the feeling that they do not belong (Strayhorn, 2012), and scholars and researchers have provided recommendations to help students of color. The co-researchers express the need to excel by any means necessary. Their determination is preceded by their unconscious or conscious awareness that HWIs are not assisting in them in their educational goals. As a result, co-researchers seem to accept the dominant narrative, assuming that their success depends mainly on self-determination because they cannot expect the institution to make much of a commitment to assist them.

The co-researchers' conceptions of success exhibit elements of resilience and determination. John Henry's story is about racism and systematic oppression, but rather than focus on why John was forced to work against a machine that clearly had the advantage, I would rather focus on John's determination, which was framed around

resistance. In examining the co-researchers' responses, we see resilience in every story, whether it came from their *upbringing, family influences,* or *societal influences*. This strategy or coping mechanism by Black males is not a new phenomenon and is consistent with research showing that Black males persist to degree completion despite stereotypes, low expectations, and discrimination against them (Fries-Britt, 1997; Harris III, Palmer, & Struve, 2011; Strayhorn, Johnson, & Barrett, 2013). Bush and Bush (2013), in discussing African American male theory (AAMT), also use resiliency as a key tenet: "AAMT connects resistance with resiliency and focuses on ways in which African American boys, men, and systems reject White mainstream cultural hegemony and oppression" (p. 11).

All of the co-researchers had experiences conceptualizing success and were motivated by a sense of resilience and determination stemming from how they were raised (upbringing), their family influences, and/or their social environment. It is vital to understand the roots of the co-researchers' conceptualizations of success, because these lead to their definitions of success. If universities, particularly HWIs, are truly looking for ways to support Black males' success, understanding how they conceptualize it is certainly a place to start. I will discuss this topic further in Chapter 6.

Four conceptions of excellence analysis. It is important to analyze the responses to determine the extent to which the co-researchers' perceptions of the institution's definitions of success matches their own definitions of success. Co-researchers were asked how their definitions differ from the institution's, and the analysis provides a substantial body of evidence for the recommendations put forth in the next chapter. The first of the four conceptions of excellence is mental proficiency, which was discussed

earlier. Second is disciplinary initiation, which is shaped by a view of knowledge and understanding as inherently social or inter-subjective, taking place in institutional contexts in which individuals contribute to an ongoing evolution of ideas and standards. Third is self-actualization, which emphasizes self-awareness and personal growth. Social responsibility is fourth; it extends beyond the individual to the community and places the satisfaction of individual ends in the context of the community of ends (Prakash & Waks, 1985, p. 87). The majority of co-researchers said that their definition of success was different from the institution's, as expressed in the following excerpts that reflect the four conceptions of success.

Mental Proficiency

> Miles Morales: I would say my definition is similar, if not the same. I think the caveat to that, though, is success is still relative. You can't say that if you're not a middle-aged male in a nuclear family with two kids, a house, a mortgage, two incomes, you can't say that that is the finite one definition of success. Because if my goal is to put on my shoes and tie my shoes correctly, and I meet that goal, that's success. That's what the definition of success is, having a goal and meeting it.

Self-actualization

> Wilson: Another part of success that I see is just getting involved in something you're passionate about. For some people, that second part comes easier because of who they may know or the connections they may have that aren't as easy for other people to get.

Disciplinary initiation

> Black Panther: Oh, it's very different than mine's. It's very different than mine's, because I've learned that it's very problematic on this campus to challenge the answer, that that is looked upon as being defiant. That is looked upon as misguided, and I think that's an issue. I think that education should always encourage the students to challenge the answer, to allow them to validate why they believe what they believe, how they see things.

Social responsibility

> War Machine: If it weren't for being connected to different groups and organizations, I would just be here to take my classes and get out of here. I have friends who have never stayed on campus and who live in apartments, and just come to class and go back home, and work on the class, come back and work, and not a part of any groups. Seeing that and looking back, taking my perspective from actually being here and as opposed, if I weren't here, to see that if you're not here on campus and getting involved, and not learning about different opportunities and different things that you can do as an individual, then you would only be here to get your degree, which we all are here to be, but that would be your main focus and you wouldn't see anything past that.

The dominant narrative in higher education and student success is that this Midwestern Research I HWI desires to have Black males attending and ultimately receiving their degree. But the counter-story is that this Midwestern Research I HWI needs Black males only as tokens of racial diversity and defines student success very narrowly in ways that refuse to invest other conceptions of success.

Personal Reflection

It is important to acknowledge the ways in which I see my own feelings reflected in the responses of the twelve co-researchers in this study. Interviewing each one was an amazing experience that I will personally be connected to for the rest of my life. I say this because I saw myself in all twelve participants. In each of them, I saw moments of resilience and determination. As they were reflecting, I could see glimpses of pride in being Black, despite not feeling welcomed or wanted. I saw the moments of anger when they explained a racialized experience, the hurt, and the sadness wrapped up in anger and determination. Quite honestly, I was left feeling validated and no longer alone. But I also saw other things that were disappointing. I saw flashes of homophobia and classism. At times, I wanted to stop the recording and have a teachable moment. I was perplexed because I wanted this process to be authentic and true, yet I never stopped or even

engaged in a conversation about exposing their Black male patriarchy and homophobia. This study has caused me to grow and challenged me to be a better ally who is more immersed in the praxis of my study.

Summary

The study shows the experiences of Black male collegians at a Midwestern Research I institution. Twelve counter-stories were analyzed through the lens of the triple theoretical frameworks of critical race theory (CRT), intersectionality, and four conceptions of excellence. Three questions guided their responses using three frameworks for analysis. The data reveal not only that these Black men's experiences counter the dominant narratives about student success, but also that they framed success in traditional ways as well. This does not come as a surprise, because Black males participate in patriarchal capitalistic values.

Upbringing, family expectations, and societal influences all play a huge role in shaping the co-researchers' definitions of success; this leads to their own ideas about student success at institutions of higher education. Moreover, co-researchers are aware that institutional conceptions of success do not match their own conceptions of success. The co-researchers agreed that the institution has a responsibility to invest in other conceptions of success that would benefit Black males and other marginalized populations. All of the co-researchers expressed in their own voices what they would do if they were in charge. I will discuss these responses in Chapter 6 because I intentionally want them, as co-researchers, to provide recommendations and insight on how HWIs can support student success beyond degree attainment.

Chapter 6. Discussion of Findings, Implications, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter begins with a brief overview of Chapters 1 through 5. Chapter 1 provides motivation for the study. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature and the theoretical frameworks. Chapter 3 explains the methods used for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 presents the data – the study participants' counter-stories. Chapter 5 details the data analysis using the techniques outlined in Chapter 3. The overview is followed by a discussion of the project's conclusions, implications, and recommendations. This chapter concludes with my own personal story about success.

Overview

Black males are a marginalized group in the United States and in higher education. A robust body of literature has been published regarding Black males in higher education, and the amount of research on the topic has increased dramatically during the past ten years. However, few studies approach the topic from an anti-deficit perspective. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the challenges that Black male collegians face at HWIs, including difficulty fitting in, hyper-surveillance, backlash for "acting white," exploitation for athletic ability, and experiences of a racialized nature. As a result, Black male collegians receive lower grades and are less likely to receive a degree than their white classmates are**.** In fact, their graduation rates are abysmal compared to those of their white counterparts, which is discouraging to Black males and to others who seek equity in higher education. Graduation rates and other narrowly defined, measurable metrics are the most common markers of "success" among institutions of higher education. However, this study's purpose is to shed light on how Black male collegians

themselves define success. If colleges and universities hope to close the achievement gap and decrease the marginalization of Black male collegians on campus, Black male students must be a part of the conversation about student success. This study therefore explores a) how Black male collegians define success, b) how their college experiences inform these definitions, and c) whether Black male collegians perceive that their institutions value their definitions of success and incorporate them into policies and programs. Additionally, this study explores the socialization process through which Black males come to identify success, and particularly the extent to which they, as men, frame success in patriarchal ways that mirror their institutions' views of student success.

Therefore, this study focuses on investigating Black males' college experiences and their perceptions of student success at a four-year public Research 1 institution in a Midwestern state. The central research questions for this study are:

1. How do Black male collegians conceptualize success?
2. What experiences socialize Black men to their definitions of success?
3. How do these students perceive institutional conceptions of success?

Chapter 2 reviews the literature taken into consideration for this study. It both examines the historical context of Blacks in U.S higher education and surveys the literature on student success in higher education, with emphasis on (1) Black males' experiences, both historical and contemporary; (2) college engagement; and (3) Black male persistence.

This study shapes and addresses its research questions using three frameworks from a theoretical perspective: critical race theory (CRT), intersectionality, and Prakash

& Waks's four conceptions of excellence. The most important principles and forms for each of these theories are given in Table 2.1 in Chapter 2.

The "basic CRT model consists of five elements focusing on: (a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the trans-disciplinary perspective" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 22). Using this framework, we can intentionally address the intersections of race, class, and gender while simultaneously addressing traditional success factors (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) such as classroom settings, administrative elements, institutional climate, and student success measures for Black males at HWIs.

Intersectionality can be defined as the "relationships among multiple social dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). Understanding how these multiple identities intersect provides a more holistic understanding of individuals and their experiences (Museus & Griffin, 2011). In the context of this study, using an intersectional framework provides a theoretical analysis leading to a better understanding of the experiences of students of color and Black males. Using this framework allows me to explore how Black men's definitions of success are to patriarchal, homophobic, and sexist notions of Black manhood.

Prakash and Waks (1985) define the four conceptions of excellence as "the technical, the rational, the personal, and the social" and describe the standards of educational excellence associated with each (p. 79); these are operationalized (respectively) as mental proficiency, disciplinary initiation, self-actualization, and social responsibility.

These three theoretical frameworks are used to analyze the dominant discourse about student success, which defines success narrowly and which creates barriers for people in marginalized groups, including Black male collegians, who participate in higher education at HWIs.

Chapter 3 discusses this study's methodology. I chose the counter-storytelling approach because it positions the participants as co-researchers and co-constructors of knowledge. Furthermore, this approach provides agency for voices that are typically unheard and marginalized (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-storytelling is an essential method of CRT (Matsuda, 1995). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define it as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (p. 26). The purpose of this study is to gain insight from Black males' perceptions of student success, and counter-storytelling is a constructive way to do so because it not only gives voice to people of color, but also serves as a way to disrupt the dominant discourses (Hunn, Guy, & Manglitz, 2006).

Participants were recruited through student organization email lists, emails to colleagues who work with student organizations, and social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, GroupMe, and Instagram. The sampling criteria are central to the study's effectiveness in examining Black male collegians' perceptions of success. As I made initial contact with participants, I issued a demographic survey (shown in Appendix A) to ensure that I recruited participants who met the study criteria. Participants were Black males enrolled full-time or part-time as undergraduate or graduate students, as well as former students who had attended or graduated from this Midwest Research 1 institution within the last five years.

I framed the interview questions around Black males' experiences. In writing the interview questions, I was guided by two previously published studies, whose questions I adapted for use in this project: Rolland's (2011) dissertation *African American Male Students' Perceptions of Factors that Contribute to their Academic Success* and Dancy's (2012) *The Brother Code: Manhood and Masculinity among African American Males in College.* Appendix B shows the open-ended interview questions used in this study to elicit insight regarding Black males' perceptions of student success**.** Because the interviews proceeded in an organic way, not every question was asked in every interview. However, most of the questions were asked in most of the interviews. In fact, even when some questions were not asked directly, they typically were answered through the natural flow of the conversation. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed for analysis. I analyzed the resulting data thematically through a process of descriptive coding, interpretative coding, and definition of overarching themes. To minimize the amount of researcher bias, I employed several techniques recommended for the counter-storytelling method. I kept a reflective research journal, engaged in peer debriefing, and used the process of member checking to ensure that my biases did not lead me to misinterpret participants' perceptions.

Chapter 4 presents the data used in this study: the twelve co-researchers' counter-stories. The chapter focuses on these Black male collegians' expectations and experiences and provides robust contextual knowledge regarding the men's backstories and the ways in which their counter-stories disrupt the dominant narrative that Black males attending HWIs feel the same sense of belonging that white students do.

Chapter 5 presents the findings, including the main themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. These themes enabled me to characterize pairs of narrative threads, with each dominant narrative having a corresponding counter-narrative, as summarized in Table 5.1 in Chapter 5.

The twelve participants expressed quite a few similar themes throughout their counter-stories. When first enrolling, most of the co-researchers and many of their family members expected that the institution would be supportive of them and their success. However, their counter-stories reveal that this expectation was not fulfilled. Still, despite some negative experiences at the institution, many co-researchers remained motivated to persist and earn a degree. The counter-stories indicated that Black male collegians have a deep sense of resiliency and determination to complete their degree, and many of them have family support for continuing their education. Yet they face numerous obstacles that make it difficult for them to reach their desired goal of degree attainment.

The negative experiences faced by the twelve co-researchers include overt and covert racism, microaggressions, and silencing by the institution, faculty, staff, and peers. These sorts of experiences are known to lead to a number of detrimental consequences, such as internalized oppression, anti-Blackness, physical and mental health problems, unhealthy habits, and other manifestations of stress. To survive and persist in this environment, Black male collegians and other marginalized student populations must adapt and find coping strategies if they are to obtain their degree. But adapting to a hostile environment forces them to hide their authentic selves, tirelessly switching back and forth between two identities, or, in W.E.B. Du Bois's apt phrase, engaging in "double consciousness." Du Bois expresses the notion of double consciousness in a figurative

way, but Arnold Rampersad frames double consciousness in psychological research in examining cases of split personality (Bruce, 1992). Both the figurative and psychological meanings of double consciousness have relevancy in this institution of higher education. It is both emotionally and psychologically exhausting to have to function simultaneously in two worlds, one of which allows Black people to live authentically while the other one seeks to negate Black people's very existence.

Discussion of Findings

The last 10 years have seen an explosion of research literature regarding Black males in U.S. higher education. These studies attribute Black males' lack of success at HWI's to a variety of causes, including educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, and disengagement (Harper, 2012). Notably, most of these studies take a "deficit" perspective: They focus on Black male students' deficits, rather than the institution's shortcomings, in their approach to the problem. The purpose of my study, on the other hand, is to provide an opportunity for Black male collegians to narrate through counter-storytelling their experiences during their academic career at an HWI. Black male collegians' experiences are rarely told through their own lens, but my approach allows their stories to be told and to disrupt the dominant discourse (Berry & Stovall, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Altering the dominant discourse through counter-storytelling gives Black male collegians the opportunity to challenge their institutions' conceptions of success.

To present the themes, the data were organized into the following categories and subcategories:

1. Conceptualizing success
    a. Dominant narratives

    b. Counter-story narratives
2. Socializing success
    a. Coping
        i. Upbringing
        ii. Family expectations
        iii. Social influences
    b. Manhood and masculinity
3. Institutionalizing success

Research Question 1: Conceptualizing Student Success

How do Black male collegians conceptualize success? The following dominant narrative themes emerged from the data: *academics, degree attainment, college experience, access to institution,* and *prestige*. These themes are in line with those found in other studies that elicit the narrative of attending college to obtain a degree for social and economic mobility. Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek (2006) state that "earning a baccalaureate degree is the most important rung in the economic ladder as college graduates on average earn almost a million dollars more over the course of their working lives than those with only a high school diploma" (p. 1). Additionally, these studies emphasize the notion that attending college enhances one's chances for upward mobility (Bowen, 1978; Bowen and Bok, 1998; Boyer and Hechinger, 1981; Nuñez, 1998; Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Trow 2001; Pennington, 2004).

This study's twelve co-researchers frame student success in a dualistic way. On the one hand, they report that they define success as the institution itself does: "success" means earning a degree, which in turn purportedly will lead to a better quality of life. On the other hand, the co-researchers push past the dominant ways of defining student success, expanding their conceptions of success in complex and multi-layered ways. The

expanded themes emerging from the counter-stories include *work twice as hard*, *race as hindrance at HWIs*, *community*, *representation,* and *holistic success*. Co-researchers expressed concerns about the unfairness of *working twice as hard* as other students do. They also mentioned the unfairness they encountered and the frustration they felt when being excluded by white students during assigned group projects. Other similar studies related to unfairness and isolation include those by Davis et al. (2004), Harper (2012), and Strayhorn (2008). *Race as a hindrance* is another theme that emerged from the counter-stories. The co-researchers explained that their being Black is a problem for the institution, not for them personally. Furthermore, co-researchers reported the difficulty of being Black and "successful" at HWIs: They express the sense that being successful places a figurative target on their backs, leading to their being seen as a threat, being accused of cheating, and encountering other negative consequences. In a similar vein, the co-researchers report feeling that they are expected to be seen but not heard. For instance, several participants noted that the institution is quick to choose images of Black male students for newspaper covers and glossy brochures, but only on the condition that they remain quiet and do not disrupt the dominant narrative of higher education. In researching issues related to the campus climate for Black male students and other marginalized student populations, other scholars have found that marginalized students perceive the campus environment as hostile (Steele, 2010; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007) and unwelcoming. Yet despite these barriers, co-researchers also expressed the idea that developing a sense of Black *community* was an element of student success. In other words, finding and building a community is part of how they define student success as a Black student at an HWI. More importantly, co-researchers demonstrate a *holistic*

perspective in the other elements of student success that they identify, such as identity exploration, community involvement, and self-actualization. These are components of success that cannot be measured in the same way that graduation rates and GPAs can, yet they are clearly important to the co-researchers' personal assessment of their own success. This is supported by the theoretical framework of Prakash and Waks's four conceptions of excellence (1985).

Using CRT, we see the ways in which racism, and racist people, support and reinforce the institution. The co-researchers' resistance, persistence, and coping strategies are tools that disrupt the dominant narrative and shed light on how Black male collegians navigate through the HWI's treacherous terrain. HWIs must reexamine themselves, change their environments, and increase inclusiveness if they are to become welcoming and supportive to all students, especially if they are serious in their commitment to foster success among Black male collegians.

Research Question 2: Socializing Success

How do Black male collegians' experiences socialize them to these understandings of success? In the interviews, the co-researchers expressed their expectation and determination to succeed regardless of the circumstances. Their family members supported this expectation, but the co-researchers also expressed deep conviction within themselves. They often spoke about a "prove them wrong" mentality and a sense of determination when confronting stereotypes, enduring racialized experiences, feeling unsupported academically, and being silenced. Kim & Hargrove (2013) express a similar sentiment in discussing Black male students: "Practicing prove-them-wrong behavior, they refused to engage in social distancing in order to oppose

campus racism, instead developing meaningful, supportive relationships." (p. 302). Although my results also show evidence that Black male students practice "prove them wrong" behavior and value relationship-building, I have to question Kim and Hargrove's analysis here. Specifically, I question whether it is possible for "meaningful, supportive relationships" to emerge in the context of the "prove them wrong" mentality. If people need "proof" that I am really a human being, then those types of relationships create harm, and distancing myself is the better strategy to adopt.

Additionally, I critique the "prove them wrong" approach because of how masculinity is nuanced. On the one hand, "prove them wrong" is inhumane and framed around race superiority (racism), and on the other hand, it is gendered in ways that place Black males in the position of having to prove their manhood (Dancy, 2012). Buying in to the "prove them wrong" mindset paves the way for Black males to silence themselves, women, transgender people, and other marginalized populations; it normalizes sexism, reproduces misogyny, and frames masculinity in a narrow and homogenous way. Whiteness, patriarchy, and hegemonic masculinity form the very foundation of the "prove them wrong" mentality and pit Black bodies against themselves, destroying them and other marginalized populations while preserving systems of oppression. For this study's participants, the "prove them wrong" mindset is wrapped in masculinity to enable them to survive in a racist colonial environment. This is why John Henry desired to beat the machine, but destroyed himself in the process.

In their counter-stories, the co-researchers shared information about their upbringing, family expectations, and the social influences that help them conceptualize success. Unsurprisingly, I noticed a connection between family expectations and

academic expectations. Several participants expressed gratitude toward their family for how they were raised or for what their family expected from them. Although research on parental expectations has produced conflicting evidence (Sy & Romero, 2008; Davis-Kean, 2005), this study's participants were found to value their parents' beliefs and the ideals that contributed to their upbringing. Socioeconomic status and parents' level of education appear to have had no effect on the co-researchers' determination to graduate from college (although these factors do have an effect on the availability of resources to support college attendance): Regardless of parents' income, all co-researchers expressed the expectation that they would earn a degree. Said differently, co-researchers were highly motivated to get a degree, but circumstances beyond their control had the potential to prevent them from graduating. However, even knowing this, co-researchers were determined to complete their studies. Moreover, co-researchers consistently gave their families credit for their resilience in dealing with difficult experiences at the HWI.

The following excerpts from the co-researchers' stories highlight their thoughts about upbringing, family expectations, and societal influences.

> Wilson: I always think that they perceive, or just honestly anyone perceives that Black people, or myself, are less capable than them if that makes sense. Academically. Just anything, honestly. I feel like they think they are more capable of doing things and I feel like if myself, if I do something better than them, that they think I had some unfair advantage just because I'm Black. I heard a comment one time that a Black person received a scholarship because they were a minority. I was like, "How do you know they didn't receive it because of their merit or because of this or because of that?"

> Luke Cage: Black women, now that's something special. Now, you see, I got a special place in my heart for Black women. I feel like, I ain't going to lie, I feel like they love me, but that's because I was raised just by my mama. I was raised by mama and my two grandmas. They taught me everything they could growing up. I think Black women are our most prized possession, I really do.

> War Machine: Church is a huge aspect, my faith. Part of my dad's profession, he's a pastor, so that's been in my life for a long time now. Holding on to my faith has definitely got me thus far and keeping me grounded, and getting me through tough situations when I faced challenges, and helping me to remain resilient.
>
> Black Panther: I think males are always expected to take a leadership role. That's a perception I'm fine with. I think I'm a natural born leader, so I think just being a male, you're expected to be more of a leader. I'm fine with that. I think I'm a pretty good leader. I just try to take control of any situation I'm in.

Societal influences constituted another factor in the co-researchers' definitions of success. The findings indicated that the co-researchers equated a college degree with monetary gain and prestige. Additionally, the co-researchers were asked about how they were perceived by people with other identities. This question was intended to elicit insight about how participants believe society perceives them and whether they perceived society in similar ways. Race was a strong component of the co-researchers' answers to these questions, and their responses consistently aligned with common perceptions that non-Black people have about people of color: they are "hostile" or a "threat," they are at college only for athletics, and so forth. However, I also asked co-researchers about their other identities, including those in which they hold privilege. These responses were different, and it was clear that many of the co-researchers thought of their privileged identities as a factor that helped "level the playing field." In other words, in their marginalized identity as Black people, Black males were socialized to frame success from a "prove them wrong" perspective, which is understandable considering the context of Blacks' treatment at the hand of white people throughout U.S. history. But in their privileged identities (as males, for instance), the co-researchers view success as being equally attainable for everyone. This suggests that society may skew their ideologies of

success, but it also supports the notion that despite Black males' marginalization, they too can be unaware of their own privilege.

Research Question 3: Institutionalizing Success

How do these students perceive institutional conceptions of success? The co-researchers provided an array of answers that disrupt the dominant narrative of student success. The co-researchers' stories indicate that, in their perception, the institution defines success in terms of degree attainment. Indeed, the co-researchers expressed multiple times that the institution cares only about numbers and does little to contribute to students' overall well-being. In discussing their recruitment before they entered the university, some co-researchers reflected on the messages of diversity that turned out to be false. One participant went so far as to speak about how the brochures and advertisements intentionally depict people of color to create a false impression of a highly diverse campus.

> Isaiah Bradley: like I said, you get used as the token. I remember, on one of the admissions tickets, I was on the cover of Major Options or something, and the school had to quit publishing it 'cause they got accused of showing false diversity. It was me, a Hispanic lady and a Asian lady on the cover but it didn't show – that's not who's here in a mass majority so I guess they kind of got a fake diversity thing from the university newspaper so they quit publishing it.

Students of color frequently have their trust broken at HWIs, and false messages about diversity exacerbate the distrust. Over time, these incidents become a burden to students of color and create physical and emotional trauma. According to Smith et al. (2007), "social feelings of cohesion and moral trust are often retarded or broken between students of color and the HWI community" (p. 556). The co-researchers' perceptions about the institution's definition of student success do not match their own definitions.

But the issue runs deeper than simply differing definitions of success. The true problem is that the institution's definitions of success are the *only* forms of success validated on campus, and the institution's definitions are narrowly prescribed as criteria than can be measured numerically. This is motivated and co-opted by the systems of white capitalist patriarchy, and these definitions of success are often accepted simply because of how normalized those systems are – even though, in reality, those systems oppress, divide, and eventually suffocate any form of success that does not conform to its definitions.

Implications for Theory and Research

This study has significance in several different ways. First, it provided an opportunity for Black male collegians to share counter-stories regarding their personal experiences at an HWI. Although the amount of research on Black males in U.S. higher education has increased dramatically over the last decade, most of the published literature focuses on the "deficit" perspective that views Black males' underachievement as being caused by something they *lack* – sufficient college preparation, financial resources, and so forth. Moreover, much of the literature is framed through the lens of the researcher, not the actual Black men being studied. My study, on the other hand, gives voice to Black men's authentic stories, told from their own perspectives. Second, I explored their personal stories and experiences using a critical qualitative methodology that provides greater insight into their experiences as Black males at an HWI. More specifically, this study identified how Black males prepared for college, what expectations they had before arriving, what supports and challenges they experienced academically and socially, and what recommendations they suggest for staff, faculty, and senior administrators at this institution. Third, this study questioned the institution's responsibility and commitment to

Black males, in order to disrupt policies that both currently and historically have prevented Black males from attaining student success. In other words, this study disrupts the dominant narrative that asks what is wrong with Black males, and instead asks what resources have intentionally been withheld from Black male students and what the institution should do differently to support their success. Last, and most importantly, this study intentionally disrupts the silencing of Black males.

Through counter-storytelling, Black male collegians had the opportunity to be heard and to express their real, lived experiences in higher education. The findings revealed that the HWI environment is uniquely challenging for Black males, decreasing their likelihood of persisting to graduation. Furthermore, regardless of age, family income, classification, orientation, or religion, all of the co-researchers expressed a sense of not being accepted in their authentic self.

A qualitative methodology employing a combination of theoretical frameworks provided the means for analyzing co-researchers' stories. To analyze how dominant discourses of race, class, and gender affect people of color, particularly Black male collegians, this study used three theoretical frameworks: critical race theory, intersectionality, and four conceptions of excellence. The dominant narrative surrounding student success is connected to the ideology of upward mobility, as a college degree increases one's likelihood of moving to a higher socioeconomic class. In fact, obtaining a degree has monetary value, estimated at about a million dollars more in lifetime earnings (Kuh et al., 2006; Ryan, 2004; Tinto, 2012a, 2012b). This dominant narrative regarding degree attainment is misleading because it reduces student success to a financial transaction in the capitalist model, creating a cascade of negative consequences for

students who encounter hostile environments on campus and who forge alternative definitions of student success.

As a result, this study has several important implications for HWIs and their students. Black males considering attending an HWI should become as familiar as possible with the institution before enrolling, learning specifically about the faculty, the staff, the culture, and other Black male students' experiences, to determine whether the institution's beliefs and values align with their own upbringing. Second, the study findings suggest that Black males are gaining access to the university with "strings attached." For example, co-researchers reported being vocal about issues of equity, race relations, and campus climate, and they found that expressing their voices in this way had negative consequences: hyper-surveillance, lack of acceptance, and intentional silencing. Co-researchers also noted that if they acted as the token Black person, they were treated well, but when they spoke out about certain issues, they were isolated, blackballed, and ignored. In other words, co-researchers learned that they could gain access and acceptance at this institution if they presented the behaviors and attitudes that the university expected of them. This phenomenon also occurs among Black athletes: Their talents generate large amounts of income for the university, but when they underperform or are injured, the resources that they usually receive are withdrawn. It is thus recommended that Black men considering enrolling at an HWI try to understand what strings will be attached to their attendance and anticipate how to disentangle themselves from them. The co-researchers express deep concerns about the institutional environment, specifically regarding who is valued and protected, and who is not. They also express a

feeling of pressure to perform for approval, yet they recognize that they would never be validated in a space that does violence and harm to them.

The theories that inform this study reflect the importance of student development, as expressed in Astin's (1977) involvement theory, Tinto's (1987) theory of student departure, Harper's (2012) literature on Black male engagement and persistence, Strayhorn's (2013) sense of belonging, DuBois' (1903) theory of double consciousness, Dancy's (2007) literature on manhood and masculinity, and, not specifically mentioned in the study until now, Maslow's hierarchy of needs.[13] By themselves, these theories do not account for the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and other identities. However, one can use these theories collectively to draw reasonable conclusions about student experiences.

Implications for the field of higher education

Because many Black male collegians possess a variety of identity privileges (e.g., from their gender, sexual orientation, and/or religious identities), it was important in this study to shed light on how the co-researchers conceptualized success from their lived experiences. But it is equally important to address how Black men perform patriarchy and homophobia. How can administrators and practitioners acknowledge these concerns to produce more inclusive environments? First, I recommend sincere institutional commitment to inclusive education and curriculum, including workshops dealing with

[13] Maslow (1943) stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs in a hierarchical order. When a person's lowest-level need (for food and water) is fulfilled, they seek to fulfill the next one, and so on. This five-stage model can be divided into basic (or deficiency) needs, such as the need for food, shelter, safety, love, and esteem, and growth needs, such as the need for self-actualization.

unlearning isms.[14] It is crucial to ensure that the curriculum around these unlearning workshops is grounded in CRT, intersectionality, and other theories of emancipation to disrupt and dismantle oppressions. Second, I recommend that administrators and practitioners collaborate with students in creating these learning opportunities. For so long, institutions have made policies and procedures that affect students but seldom involve student themselves in the process. And even when they do involve students, those students do not necessarily reflect the interests and perspectives of other marginalized students. Administrators and practitioners must be intentional about how they engage diverse student populations. Finally, I recommended that intersectionality be a required course and a foundation for curriculum in college courses.

Recommendations

Consistent with this study's emphasis on revealing the authentic voices of Black male collegians, this section provides feedback and recommendations based on the co-researchers' counter-stories. In most research, participants and researchers hold different positions of power in a manner that is influenced by colonial practices. As in the pedagogy of education, the researchers hold more knowledge on certain subjects and often assume the position as interpreter (Patel, 2015). This study, on the other hand, was designed to intentionally disrupt this power structure, thereby generating knowledge stemming from the participants themselves, as exemplified in the following counter-story excerpts.

[14] Racism , classism, ableism, sexism, LGBTQi

The co-researchers were asked: *What do you think the role of the university is for Black males? More specifically, if you ran this institution, what would you do to support Black men's student success at this institution*?

- *Be more assertive for Black males*

  Night Thrasher: I feel like to help Black males, the university should just basically be more assertive, be more dominant, be more there for their BlackBlack males.

- *Safety and representation*

  Miles Morales: I think first and foremost is higher education is a safe haven. It's a great equalizer, especially for minorities, and especially for Black males. You always have to have people in positions who look like you. White males achieve because they see older white males achieving. White females achieve because they see older white females achieving, and so forth. Black males achieve because they see older Black males achieving.

  Blade: If I ran this university. In order to see Black males succeed in class, I would incorporate new initiatives such as allowing the Black males to see more of us on campus who can help us get to where we need to be. Let's say whether it's a mentoring program, or a tutoring program, created for Black males to succeed. What we have is general tutoring programs, general mentorship programs for people, but if you were to go there, you wouldn't see anybody like you. You wouldn't feel comfortable. You wouldn't feel included. If we add more places where we would be ... Where we would feel more comfortable, where there were more people who looked like us. It would be really useful for the Black males especially.

- *Opportunity to succeed*

  Black Goliath: I think the role of the university to Black men is to offer a place for them to succeed, that's generally. That's an overview. Me, personally, I might be a little bit different than a lot of people with this, but I wouldn't want and I don't expect the university to cater towards me 'cause I'm a Black man. I wouldn't want it because everything that I earned, everything that I learned, I want it to be based on the same criteria as everybody else. That's how I am personally. So I don't want a particular style of catering for Black men.

- *Encouraging voice*

  Wilson: I think it's just almost like that encouraging voice. We have so many people telling us that we got here because of this or we can't do this. Like I said, the one time I heard someone say somebody got a scholarship based on the fact

that they were Black, we just have to hear stuff like that all the time. We got here because this happened or this wouldn't be like this if this happened, or blah blah blah. I think the biggest thing that they could do for me is an encouraging voice.

- *Information*

  Luke Cage: This is what I really think, which I'm not sure when I got in, but if I ran the university, honestly, I really don't have an answer. I know that I will want to help them in some way, but I really don't know how. I wouldn't know where to start, because, personally, I've always been different. I don't know what we as a whole need. I do know that we need to be more informed about stuff, and so I try to make a way to inform us about certain things, like taxes, healthcare, just stuff like that that a lot of us don't know about.

- *Financial support*

  War Machine: I would definitely do my best to provide financial help to the Black community, males specifically, because what I've seen is the money is a huge problem for the African American community, and the university knows this of course. Implementing programs like TRIO, definitely helping those programs and sustaining those programs that are hugely beneficial to the Black community, and providing resources for organizations. In other words, making sure that those organizations grow and have the funds and the necessary resources they need to not only help us be successful in our classes, but to retain us here and to make sure we get to the end.

- *Education about diversity*

  Nick Fury: So I think the university, as a Black male, they should be holding more events geared towards diversity, holding a lot, not only diversity events, but trying to hold diversity events that's required by everybody on this campus to attend throughout the whole year, because eventually you're gonna have to have – It'll start changing people's perception, making some classes mandatory for students that can learn to get some background knowledge, cuz like we've talked about, not everybody comes from the same background, but people assume like, OK, he's Black. We're not gonna help him. He's just a simple same person we just talked to that was out there, so they probably have been saying that story, "Don't talk to him." They're not worth nothing. But the University's just more so and still just getting to know somebody and still in that we don't judge a book by its cover until you know exactly what they went through.

- *Unity despite systems of oppression*

  Bishop: Coming together more as one. I feel like we still ... making sure we all come together as one. I feel like this organization is doing that and this organization is doing that but nobody is doing things together. It still makes the

Black community look split. Although in our minds we think we're all in this together but I know for a fact from the outside, I've actually come across a white student who asked me, why do Black students do this and that separately. Which makes sense because everyone has different organizations but we never come together as one unless we have stomp-down picnic out there…. Make sure that we all come together as one, because people see that. They don't say nothing, but people see it.

- *Pipeline programs*

Isaiah Bradley: If I was the university president, I would keep pipeline programs. I would probably start one for Native American conferences and Asians. They're not really hurting to get here but you can't leave one minority out for another. And you never know, some kids out there might really need help but I think those pipeline programs are the perfect segue from high school to college. Not only to get ready, but just to find somebody on campus that looks like you, talks like you, before you even get there.

- *Counseling (mental health to academics)*

Cloak: I believe I would put more counselors out there to make Black males aware, Black athletes specifically, aware of how they're being used. And give them different ways to be able to do more of what they want to do. Not what the university wants them to do. And not just graduate. Like I said, I was forced to take easier courses, rather than the more complicated ones I wanted to take. So like I said, I would definitely put more counselors out there to be able to support their decisions, not the university's. I also would ... I don't know maybe get ... Come up with some kind of interaction course. Of like how Black males would be able to interact with different cultures. Because like I said, I came from a culture where I didn't have any interactions with whites, or anything like that. So, everything was a shock to me.

- *Mattering*

Black Panther: I'd definitely insist that the institution should be looking to the African American men and letting them know that, "You matter," and not that, "You matter as a charity," not that "you matter as an extension of the university," but you matter as the student. You are a student. You are nothing that is, as we would say, an accessory. You are the final piece," and continually putting out there examples, but not only examples, but supplemental programming and supplemental devices to be able to enable that searching African American man to learn and achieve, to explore happily, without any conflicts, not feeling constricted in any way, but to be able to have that same journey as the other ethnicities that are on this campus.

It is important to know that the co-researchers' recommendations are made with intentionality. For so long, institutions have failed to listen to the populations they serve unless it is in their own interests. As it stands in the United States, both historically and today, Black people continue to be left out of conversations concerning their quality of life. I encourage institutions such as the university in this study to ask this fundamental question: What do students believe constitutes success in higher education, and are our institutional ideals of success similar to theirs? After they answer this, I would next ask, For whom is it similar? These recommendations reflect the understanding that institutions are asking what success is, but they are not asking for whom it matters most.

This study concludes that Black males' definitions of student success do not match the university's definition. More specifically, the institution places a high value only on the elements of success that can be measured numerically. When institutions refuse to acknowledge other elements and other definitions of success, they deny the existence of other possibilities. Resources are deployed overwhelmingly to bolster the dominant elements of success, leaving behind students who may be successful in other ways (see four conceptions of excellence), even at an institution that wields a vast amount of resources. This situation also creates a hostile environment where it is almost impossible for students from certain marginalized groups to survive. Unless students conform to the narratives and the success metrics of the dominant discourse, it is likely that they will suffer greatly. White capitalist patriarchal supremacy oppresses in ways that divide resources and silence others who do not look like them, believe like them, or create for them. Higher education in the United States is inherently a by-product of white supremacy; institutions such as the one in this study, by their very history, are designed to

marginalize and divide, to consciously and unconsciously destroy people of color. The results of this study therefore call upon administrators, faculty, and staff to identify which systems continue to marginalize Black people, and how. The responsibility and obligation lie with the institution to reflect upon and disrupt its own conceptions of success. If an institution of higher education is not intentionally working toward dismantling the system of oppression, and disrupting the dominant narrative, then it is supporting those systems.

It was an honor to be on this journey with twelve co-researchers.

Epilogue

Walking through this life, I can reflect back on moments of feeling privileged. I remember having conversations in which white people told me, "Wow, you are so well-spoken." I remember engaging in conversations that had no reflections of how I grew up or was raised, and how their faces reflected astonishment that this young Black boy (me) was well-spoken and educated. As a 21-year-old, I didn't know any better, all I knew was that I had to adapt to survive, and this instinct paid off. Reaching a certain pinnacle of acceptance is vital to a young adult. I transcended streets filled with drugs and gangs and joined social gatherings featuring conversations about politics and religion. From President Clinton's potential impeachment to economic policies, no topic of conversation was beyond me. I asked myself, is this what success looks like? Can I really obtain this? Perhaps my most prophetic thought as I started college was "this new path I'm going down is amazing." It was as if someone had grabbed my hand and showed me this undiscovered land. While discovering this world, I was able to take a trip overseas to Switzerland. This trip was among the most life-changing events in my young life**.** I also went Germany, Liechtenstein, and Austria, visiting museums, castles, and Nazi concentration camps. The environment I'd grown up in never would have exposed me to such knowledge. I met amazing people who still have a positive effect on me today. A week after my six-day trip, I was talking to one of my friends from the 'hood. I told him that I had gone to these places. I began to share a few stories. I talked about this castle that I saw, and how there were so many rooms. You could tell that the people who had lived here had a long and rich cultural tradition, much longer than we have here in the

United States. I talked about the deep, clear blue sea, and how the reflection of the sun was a thing of beauty.

I remember the train ride to Liechtenstein, and I was sitting there on the train looking through the window. I saw a range of huge mountains with a thin layer of snow at the very top, forest-green trees waving at me as the wind glided over the branches, and how the silver steel train was glaring back at me from the reflection of the lake. I said to myself, how did I get here?

As I continued the story, I noticed my homeboy's expression. He looked conflicted, like a battle between two forces had collided in him. He appeared happy on one front, and confused on another. No doubt he was interested in my stories, but when I stopped talking, he said to me, "You know, I've never met anyone who went to another country." And like a ton of bricks it hit me. Success wasn't receiving a just a degree, but from where I am from, success was just surviving….

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Appendix A. Demographic Profile

First Name MI Last Name Age

Grade Classification Freshman ( ) Sophomore ( ) Junior ( ) Senior ( ) Graduate ( )

E-Mail Address (If available)

How do you describe yourself?
( ) American Indian or Alaska Native ( ) Black or African American
( ) Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ( ) Hispanic or Latino
( ) Asian or Asian American ( ) Non-Hispanic White
( ) Other

Yearly Family Income
( ) under $19,999
( ) $20,000 to $39,999
( ) $40,000 to $59,999
( ) $60,000 to $79,999
( ) $80,000 to $99,999
( ) $100,000 to $119,999
( ) $120,000 to $139,999
( ) $140,000 to $159,999
( ) $160,000 to $179,000
( )$180,000 to $199,000
( ) $200,000 to $249,999
( ) $250,000 and above

Did you participate in any summer/college preparation programs prior to coming to this institution?

List all clubs, organizations, and sports you participate in at college.

Appendix B. Sample Interview Protocol

(Adapted from Dr. Gertrude Rolland's dissertation *African American Male Students' Perceptions of Factors that Contribute to their Academic Success* and Dr. Elon Dancy's *The Brother Code: Manhood Masculinity among African American Males in College)*

1. Tell us a little about yourself.

2. Describe your experiences here at the Marvel Univeristy [I will prompt for in-class and out-of-class].
    a. What are some positive experiences?
        i. Tell me a story
    b. What are some negative experiences?
    c. What do you perceive as wins and losses?

3. What are some perceptions you think others (name the others i.e. white males, white females, Black women, etc…) have about you?

4. Define student success. Why did you use this definition? What experiences that taught you what it means to be successful?
    a. Childhood experiences [add prompt, tell me the story]
    b. In class/outside class experiences
    c. Positives/negatives

5. How does being black matter to your definition of success
    a. Other identities (Class, Sexual orientation…etc
    b. Are there any other identities that matter?

6. How do you think the institution defines as success?
    a. Is the definition different from yours?
    b. Why or why not?

7. Why did you decide to attend this institution?
    a. What did you except before coming here?
    b. Is the University meeting those expectations?

8. Based on your conception of success, are there any barriers and challenges to success in class /outside of class, if so what are they?

9. How do you interact with faculty/staff on campus? [I will prompt for positive and negative experiences/interactions]

10. How do you interact with peers on campus? [I will prompt for positive and negative experiences/interactions]

11. Are there outside/off-campus resources that you use?

12. What do you think the role of the university is for Black males? More specifically, If you ran this institution what would you do to support Black men's student success [institution]? [If necessary, I will make clear that I am not asking for a general evaluation of the school.]

13. Do you have any advice or tips you would give to undergraduate/Graduate men of color at PWIs (especially those who are incoming freshmen)?