Exchanging Perceptions of Successful Black College Males: An Analysis of Their Experiences with Successfully Enrolling, Retaining, and Persisting Toward Graduation at St. John's University

James Salnave
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Examining Perceptions of Successful Black College Males: An Analysis of Their Experiences with Successfully Enrolling, Retaining, andPersisting Toward Graduation at St. John's University

Abstract
This study used Harper's (2012) anti-deficit achievement approach to examine the perceptions of Black males who have succeeded at a predominately White institution. The research brought together in-class pedagogical practices, self-efficacy, and student involvement as learning constructs linked to academic success. Qualitative research methodology captured the experiences of 13 participants through face-to-face individual interviews to gain insight into the learning environment that best engaged, retained, and helped persistence toward graduation. Participants consisted of juniors and seniors with a minimum 3.0 grade point average and on track to graduate on time. Analysis indicated participants developed meaningful networks of support with family, peers, and faculty and participated in activities, which enriched skill development and overall support of their community on and off campus. The seven emergent themes included characteristics of the university, caring and engaging faculty, innovative teaching methods, motivations for success, personal development and community support, reasons for departure, and support services needed for success. Implications include ways to increase enrollment, retention, persistence, and graduation rates. Recommendations include the need for faculty and staff to develop stronger relationships with Black males, increase the number of Black faculty members to provide more outreach, institute stronger collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs, establish a resource center dedicated to Black male success, make connections to successful Black alumni, and develop a high school to college preparatory program to increase access and opportunity. Recommendations for future research include the duplication of this study with Latino males to determine commonalities or differences in experiences.

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Jennifer Schulman

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Examining Perceptions of Successful Black College Males: An Analysis of Their Experiences with Successfully Enrolling, Retaining, and Persisting Toward Graduation at St. John’s University

By

James Salnave

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Dr. Claudia L. Edwards

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St. John Fisher College

December 2013
Dedication

First and foremost I would like to thank God for getting me through the hardest year of my life. Through this dissertation process I have found a renewed strength within myself, and in my abilities to persevere in the face of adversity. I dedicate this manuscript to my brother, Rodney Salnave, my father Pierre Salnave, and my aunt Yolaine Mary, who were all taken from me in a matter of 7 months last year. These three angels were always by my side and supported my education since elementary school. I would have never made it this far without their belief in me and in my abilities. I respectfully dedicate this to you. To my mom, Mona Salnave, and my good friend and sister, Jodi Cox, who have been my light during the darkest days and my support throughout the process, thank you for all that you have done.

To my friends and colleagues at St. John’s University, especially Dr. Clover Hall who served as my Executive Mentor, thank you for your love and support throughout this journey. To my St. John Fisher cohort family and my team members of Team Endeavor, thanks for the amazing experience and the continued support until the very end. I would not have traded this experience or the people for anything. To the faculty of St. John Fisher College (CNR), thank you for always challenging and supporting me. You always told us to trust the process, and now that I have reached the summit, I fully understand what that means. To the participants of this study, thank you for allowing me to learn from you so that others too may learn. Your stories of strength and endurance show that hard work and dedication truly pays off at the end. Finally to my dissertation chair, Dr.
Claudia E. Edwards, and committee member, Dr. Jennifer Schulman, thank you for being consummate supporters while guiding me through this time of personal and professional development. As I told you both during our first meeting, I am a sponge; thanks for pouring into me the value of being consistent and remaining steadfast to the end goal.
Biographical Sketch

James Salnave is currently the Associate Dean for Student Development at St. John’s University. Mr. Salnave is a double alumnus of St. John’s University with a Bachelor of Arts in 1998 and a Master of Science in 2002. He came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2011 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Mr. Salnave pursued his research in Examining Perceptions of Successful Black College Males: An Analysis of Their Experiences with Successfully Enrolling, Retaining, and Persisting Towards Graduation At a Predominately White Urban University under the direction of Dr. Claudia L. Edwards and Dr. Jennifer Schulman and received the Ed.D. degree in 2014.
Abstract

This study used Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement approach to examine the perceptions of Black males who have succeeded at a predominately White institution. The research brought together in-class pedagogical practices, self-efficacy, and student involvement as learning constructs linked to academic success. Qualitative research methodology captured the experiences of 13 participants through face-to-face individual interviews to gain insight into the learning environment that best engaged, retained, and helped persistence toward graduation. Participants consisted of juniors and seniors with a minimum 3.0 grade point average and on track to graduate on time.

Analysis indicated participants developed meaningful networks of support with family, peers, and faculty and participated in activities, which enriched skill development and overall support of their community on and off campus. The seven emergent themes included characteristics of the university, caring and engaging faculty, innovative teaching methods, motivations for success, personal development and community support, reasons for departure, and support services needed for success. Implications include ways to increase enrollment, retention, persistence, and graduation rates.

Recommendations include the need for faculty and staff to develop stronger relationships with Black males, increase the number of Black faculty members to provide more outreach, institute stronger collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs, establish a resource center dedicated to Black male success, make connections to successful Black alumni, and develop a high school to college preparatory program to
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

There is a demand to know if higher education is preparing students to be productive citizens after college. According to a special report by The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2008), given the many societal issues affecting higher education, there are two fundamental responsibilities to assist in the well-being of the nation. The first is to provide graduates with the proper skills to be prepared for a competitive and volatile economy. The other is to minimize the gap between those who are educationally, culturally, and economically advantaged and those who are not. Although these are recognized fundamental responsibilities for higher education, the achievement gap among minorities in higher education has remained a persistent and most pressing problem (Rovai, Gallien, & Wighting, 2005). Factors that lead to this achievement gap were the poor high school graduation rates, low comparative enrollment rates, and even lower college retention and graduation rates of Black males (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Ellis, 2009; Harper, 2006a; Palmer, Davis, & Maramba; 2011).

Although high school dropout rates among racial groups declined over the past 30 years, the rate for minority males remained disproportionally high. For example, in its 2012 report, the Schott Foundation for Public Education reported 52% of Blacks graduated from high school in four years as compared to 78% of Whites in 2009-2010. The report also indicated though there has been an increase in Black males graduating from high school from 42% in 2001-02 to 52% in 2009-10, the graduation rate of Whites
has increased from 71% to 78%. The Schott report hypothesized it will take nearly 50 years for Black males to secure the same high school graduation rates as their White male peers.

In spite of the increased number of Blacks enrolled in institutions of higher education, their rates of enrollment have continued to be lower than other groups. For example, The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) comparative report between 1980 and 2008 on the status and trends in education of racial and ethnic groups indicated that the enrollment rate for Whites increased from 50% to 72%, Blacks from 44% to 56%, and Hispanics from 50% to 62% (Aud et al., 2010). This increase in enrollment for Blacks, according to the report, has been largely the result of an influx of Black females who successfully enrolled at colleges and universities. Among the Black men who graduated from high school in 2000, approximately 34% enrolled in college as compared to approximately 44% of their Black female counterparts (Palmer et al., 2011). As the report noted, between 1976 and 2002 the disparity in enrollment trends for Black males and females worsened. Black female enrollment increased by 126% as compared to only 51% for Black men (Harper, 2006a). Unfortunately, Black males have not made any progress in accessing higher education (Lee & Ransom, 2011; Strayhorn, 2010).

Although enrollment has increased for Blacks, the retention and graduation of African-American males in American colleges is in a state of crisis (Ellis, 2009). Nationally, more than 68% of Black men who attend college do not graduate within six years, which accounts for the lowest college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education (Harper, 2006a). For example, a 2011 comparison report by the American Council on Education on degree attainment showed
that between 1989 and 2009 White males went from 24% to 31%, Black males from 12% to 14%, and Black females from 13% to 21% (Kim, 2011). Within a 10-year span, both White males and Black females had a significant increase unlike their Black male counterparts, which only documented a 2% increase. However, in spite of that evidence showing significant downward trends in enrollment, persistence, and graduation rates among Black males on college campuses, there is a presence of a small number who have overcome the odds and have graduated on time from four-year institution. It is this group of Black men who are the focus of this dissertation study.

This phenomenological study contributed to the small but growing number of studies (Harper 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008), which focused on those Black males who excelled academically and socially on their campuses. Harper’s (2012) Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework (Appendix A) was used to guide this study because it provided a balanced understanding of the lives of Black men in colleges and universities who persisted successfully. His framework discussed how the pre-college experiences, along with involvement, both academically and socially, impacted student engagement, and retention at a university (Astin, 1985a; Palmer & Young, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Harper’s (2012) framework provided possible areas of research to further investigate to add to the information regarding how successful Black males persisted towards graduation. His research focused on student’s perceptions on opportunities they believed were afforded to them due to their involvement in on-campus experiences, same race peer support, the role of racial identity and engagement, an examination of what they gained from their involvement, and how relationships were negotiated at six predominately White institutions (Harper, 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008).
Through qualitative methods, this research further expanded Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research and examined the perceptions of Black men enrolled at a predominately White urban university, which is racially diverse. The intent of this study was to gain insight into the learning environment both in and outside of the classroom, which best engaged, retained, and helped the participants to persist toward graduation. This study gathered information from the experiences of the participants about the teaching methods and environments that significantly impacted their learning, the specific motivations that helped them to maintain enrollment, the types of activities they participated in, and the transferable skills they developed and used in the classroom. The data was examined through the theoretical lens of Harper’s anti-deficit achievement framework (2012), Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1978), Bandura’s self-efficacy theory (1997), and Astin’s involvement theory (1984). Findings of the study offered insight for families and university officials to help increase the enrollment, retention, persistence, and graduation rates among Black males at a predominately White university.

Problem Statement

The minority achievement gap in higher education is still the most urgent problem facing the United States educational system (Rovai et al., 2005). Specifically, the enrollment and retention rates of Black males in college are critical (Ellis, 2009). Nationally, more than 68% of Black men who attended college have not graduated within six years, which accounts for the lowest college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education (Harper, 2006a). The literature on the Black male experience in college was focused on a deficit approach and explained the many
reasons why they do not successfully complete their degrees. There was a focus on low high school graduation rates, even lower college enrollment/retention rates, the maladjustment to a college environment, and racial climates as factors, which precluded them from succeeding and graduating (Aud et al., 2010; D’Augelli & Herschberger, 1993; Ellis, 2009; Harper, 2003, 2006a; Palmer et al., 2011; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999).

The literature on the state of Black men in college called for more research to better understand how to increase the enrollment, retention, persistence, and graduation rates for Black men and other underrepresented groups (Fries-Britt, 1997; Harper 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012; Person & LeNoir, 1997). According to Harper (2012), there is a need for more national research from an anti-deficit approach, which focuses on Black males who have successfully persisted towards graduation. He pointed out the importance of gaining more insight from those Black males who have experienced college differently. These students need to be asked to share their strategies for staying enrolled, succeeding academically and socially, and graduating. Unfortunately, they are the ones who are often overlooked. This situation forms the impetus of this study. It is crucial to get Black men’s perspectives on what the institution needs to do to improve the academic success among Black male students (Harper, 2012).

The extant literature separately focused on teaching methods and environments, self-efficacy, support, and student involvement as learning constructs linked to the academic success of Black males (Bonaparte, 2009; Griffin, 2006; Harper 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008; Johnson, 2007; Lee, 2009; Palmer et al., 2011). However, the dissertation research brought together all four learning constructs, which were inextricably tied to the
educational process of a Black male’s college experience (Yohannes-Reda, 2010). The dissertation study used Harper’s (2012) framework to examine these experiences to provide more insight on the phenomenon.

The literature (Bonaparte, 2009; Griffin, 2006; Harper 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012; Johnson, 2007; Lee, 2009; Palmer et al., 2011) examined predominately White institutions and historically Black college and universities, which were not ethnically diverse. The dissertation study used the setting of a predominately White university, which is ethnically diverse, to examine if there were any differences in the experiences of the successful Black males. St. John’s University is one of America's leading urban universities recognized for its superb academic programs, diverse student body, and urban vitality. Though the university was ranked third by US News (2012) for being one of the most diverse in the nation, the university administration has recognized the need to study and address an ongoing difference in retention and graduation rates for all ethnic groups and particularly the lower rates for Black students. Over the period of 2001-2011, the proportion of Whites in the entering class declined from 42% to 32% as compared to the upward trend of Black students (16% to 22%). While the university has experienced a strong increase in the enrollment rates in 2001-2011, retention rates of Black and Hispanic (76%) students have remained lower than their White (83%) and Asian (83%) counterparts. The average graduation rates for a cohort from 2001-2005 was 59% as compared to an above average rate for White (64%) students and a below average rate for Black (52%) students (St. John’s University Fact Book, 2011). Since the university sought to understand the causes of this trend in retention for Black males in particular, the dissertation study provided an understanding of what successful Black males have done
to remain enrolled and persisted towards graduation. This study sought to provide the university with pertinent information regarding possible policy and procedural changes, which may greatly impact the enrollment, retention, and persistence of Black males towards graduation.

**Theoretical Rationale**

This qualitative study was interested in examining the perceptions of successful Black males at a predominately White university, which is racially diverse; to garner an understanding of what made them successful. The intent of the study was to determine the type of learning environments both in and outside of the classroom that best engaged, retained, and helped the Black male students to persist towards graduation. The study gathered information from the experiences of the participants about the teaching methods and environment, the specific motivations that helped them to maintain enrollment, the types of activities they participated in, and the transferable skills they developed and used in the classroom. The four theories that helped explain this phenomenon were Harper’s (2013) anti-deficit achievement framework, Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory, and Astin’s (1984) involvement theory.

Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework, which builds from his research on Black males from an anti-deficit approach, was the foundation of the theoretical framework for the dissertation study. The framework created an opportunity to research Black males from an anti-deficit achievement perspective, which combats research focused on why Black males are not succeeding in college (Aud et al., 2010; D’Augelli & Herschberger, 1993; Ellis, 2009; Harper, 2003, 2006a; Palmer et al., 2011; Schwitzer et al., 1999). The anti-deficit achievement perspective provided an opportunity
to change the focus of research from why Black males have not been succeeding in college to how Black males became successful. Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008) research sought to get a better understanding on how, in spite the odds, a small percentage of Black males have been actually succeeding in college. He wanted to understand why they were not succumbing to the typical barriers that undermine their academic success. His framework provided an infrastructure for this study because of the need for more research from the anti-deficit achievement perspective in order to enact change in colleges and universities around the topics of enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of Black males at predominately White institutions (Harper, 2012).

Harper focused on pre-college socialization and readiness (pre-college support programs, parental involvement and support, etc.), the college achievement (classroom experiences, out-of-class experiences, and enriching educational experiences), and the post-college success as critical touch points that defined academic success. The dissertation study was interested in examining two of the touch points to determine whether the experiences of the participants were the same in a predominately White university that was racially diverse.

Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory described the process of how children learn. He believed a person’s development happened because of what they have learned. His theory encouraged the use of others or collaborative learning as a prerequisite to learn (Vygotsky, 1978). He proposed three elements by which children learned and developed. He suggested a need for social interaction with others to grasp the information; imitation where the learner realized their limitations and used collaborative learning; and the zone of proximal development, which described the tasks we can almost do by ourselves but
need the encouragement and guidance of others to accomplish the task (Vygotsky, 1978). This theoretical framework also provided a starting point on the types of environments Black males needed to learn. Vygotsky (1978) believed the social environment played a critical role in the development of a child. Although this research was focused on college-aged students, this theory provided context on their need to connect theory to practice through experiential learning opportunities and collaborative learning with their faculty members and peers. Sociocultural theory also assisted in examining how the cultural and social experiences of Black males impacted their college learning.

Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory emphasized how teaching and learning are highly social activities and how those interactions with parents, teachers, peers, and instructional materials influenced the cognitive and affective development of learners. The theory posited that students succeed if they receive positive reinforcement in their environment, as well as have a positive sense of self and ability to accomplish a task (Bandura, 1997). A person’s belief about their competence influences their future performance to complete a task (Bandura, 1997). This study examined how non-cognitive factors such as self-efficacy and support affected Black male learning and achievement. Through this theoretical lens, examining a student’s self-efficacy and forms of support provided important information regarding how Black males succeeded at a predominately White urban institution.

Astin’s (1984) involvement theory provided an understanding of how involvement in educationally purposeful activities/clubs enhanced the learning occurring inside the classroom. Students who were involved in activities and clubs enhanced a variety of skill sets they then applied in the classroom (Astin, 1984). The theory and
model identified the salient points of what matters in college. It promoted involvement as a means of connecting to the institution and greatly impacted retention and graduation rates. Although two of the theories included in the theoretical framework focused on childhood development, it is important to examine the path of development to fully understand how their experiences impact their abilities to succeed in a college setting.

**Anti-deficit achievement framework.** Harper, a tenured faculty member in the Graduate School of Education, Africana Studies, and Gender Studies program, Director of the Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, and Co-founder and Project Director of the University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education Graduate Preparatory Academy, focused his research on race and gender in higher education, Black male college access and achievement, and college student engagement. He published nine books and more than 90 peer-reviewed journal articles and other academic publications. His research on high-achieving Black males in college has provided predominately White colleges and universities with integral information on involvement both in and out-of-class, the need for support from parents, faculty, administrators, and peers, and insight on what these Black males did in order to succeed.

Harper (2012) argued that to better assist Black males in college there is a need to understand, from their perspectives, what the institution needs to do to foster a greater sense of community, support, and academic achievement. An overview of Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research on high achieving Black males, which led to the development of the anti-deficit achievement framework, was important to review as it provided foundational information regarding the focus and direction of the dissertation study. Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research of Black males from an anti-
deficit achievement perspective provided a balanced understanding of the lives of Black men in college and universities who enrolled, retained, and persisted toward graduation. The framework developed by Harper (2012) expanded Tinto’s (1993), Astin’s (1993) and Terenzini and Reason’s (2005) frameworks, which discussed how the pre-college experiences, along with involvement both academically and socially, impacted student engagement and retention at a university (Astin, 1985a; Palmer & Young, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Harper’s (2003) research was developed from an original inquiry to gain insight into the student perceptions on opportunities they believed were afforded to them due to their involvement in on-campus experiences. His research evolved, and he used the data from the same participants to explore same-race peer support groups, the role racial identity played in the engagement in organizations, identify what the students gained from their involvement on campus, and how the relationships were negotiated at six predominately White institutions (2006b, 2007, 2008). Harper (2012) started to collect data in 2005 for the largest-known empirical investigation of Black male undergraduates to study Black males in a variety of college and university settings.

It is this study wherein he developed the anti-deficit achievement framework, which derived from research on Black males in college, as well as theories from sociology, psychology, gender studies, and education (Harper, 2012). He focused on the pre-college socialization and readiness (pre-college support programs, parental involvement and support, etc.), the college achievement (classroom experiences, out-of-class experiences, and enriching educational experiences) and the post-college success.
Within each pipeline, a group of research questions were made available for the purposes of future research to better understand Black male student success in college.

**Sociocultural theory.** Vygotsky (1896-1934), a Soviet psychologist of the early 1900s, provided the foundation for research in social development. While in college, Vygotsky studied law, philosophy, history, language, and linguistics. He focused his attention on psychology when he published his first book, *The Psychology of Art* in 1925 (Ivic, 1994). Upon reflecting on his interactions with the theories and frameworks of his contemporaries, Vygotsky identified the need for a radical and distinctively innovative approach to understanding human behavior (Yasnitsky, 2012). Vygotsky joined fellow researchers in Moscow to thoroughly reconstruct his psychological theories. His work focused on child development and education and he believed through interaction with adults, children developed and learned with respect to culture (Ivic, 1994).

Vygotsky’s theory emphasized how the community plays a vital role in the cognitive development of a child through social interaction. Vygotsky (1978), unlike his peer Piaget who was interested in the biological and structural side of child development, stressed the contribution of culture, social interaction, and the historical dimension of mental development. From this perspective, learning was intrinsically linked to social and cultural activities taking place through active social participation (e.g., collaborative, cooperative, and peer learning) (Lee, 2009). For Vygotsky, (1978) learning preceded development, and learning new things enhanced the developmental level. However, in order to learn, one would need to be introduced to a task out of reach of one’s present abilities and with guidance and support, learning occurred (Vygotsky, 1978).
The sociocultural approach was increasingly used to understand learning and development of all students while placing culture at the core. Vygotsky’s (1978) used a three-pronged approach to describe the sociocultural theory. The first element suggested a need for social interaction with other people to grasp information. By interacting with other people sharing ideas and concepts, the learner began to grasp a global understanding of the information. The second element, imitation, is learning where the learner realizes their limitations and uses collaborative learning where they must communicate and work with other students. The third element is the zone of proximal development, which Vygotsky described as the tasks we can almost do by our self but need the encouragement and guidance of others to accomplish the task. After we receive the help of others, we will then be able to accomplish the task on our own, thus shifting them out of the zone of proximal development, whereby learning occurred (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky’s (1978) theory related to this study because it emphasized the importance of learning and how it cannot be separated from the experiences of the learner. From this viewpoint, learning requires a focus on how individuals participated in particular activities and how they drew on personal experiences to solve local problems (Nasir & Hand, 2006). According to sociocultural theory, students participated as active creators of knowledge rather than as passive receptors of pre-made knowledge (Eun, 2010).

**Self-efficacy theory.** Bandura, born December 4, 1925 in Alberta, Canada had approximately six decades of contribution to the field of psychology through social learning theory and personality psychology (Bandura, 1997). Miller and Dollard (1941) integrated behavioral and cognitive approaches, which provided the early stages of social
learning theory. In 1954, Rotter decided to move away from psychosis and behaviorism and suggested behavior is directly influenced by the environment and not psychological factors and developed social learning theory. In 1963, Bandura and Walters expounded on Rotter’s (1954) social learning theory by adding the principles of observational learning and various forms of reinforcement and renamed it social cognitive theory. Bandura bridged the gap between the work of Rotter who first introduced social learning theory as an expected outcome for a behavior, which influenced the actions and motivations of the individual and incorporated Vygotsky’s (1978) social development theory. He understood there to be a reciprocal relationship between environmental, cognitive, and influences of behavior (Bandura, 1977).

Self-efficacy is a psychological construct Bandura (1997) emphasized in social cognitive theory. Before Bandura (1997) introduced self-efficacy as being a psychological construct of social cognitive theory, he discussed human motivation in terms of outcomes expectations. Bandura (1997) labeled the term self-efficacy after treating phobic individuals with modeling techniques. He noticed although his patients could interact with the target of their fear without adverse consequences during therapy, they still differed in their perceived capabilities to use the techniques outside the therapy setting. Bandura (1997) went on to argue that a person’s belief about their capabilities influences their future behaviors and in turn produces outcomes, which self-fulfills their beliefs, and he called it self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1986) posited that although self-efficacy and outcome expectations are hypothesized to affect motivation, self-efficacy has played a larger role because anticipated outcomes depends on the judgment of how well an individual is able to perform in the given situation.
Examining Black college males through Bandura’s self-efficacy theory demonstrated how a positive sense of self was related to their adjustment and success while in college. His social cognitive theory of self-efficacy was built on the belief of a student’s perceptions of his or her competencies to perform a task produced positive outcomes. These perceptions were informed through positive reinforcement provided in their environment (Bandura, 1997). Goal setting and self-evaluation are self-regulatory processes motivated by self-efficacy beliefs to achieve learning (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura (1997), there were four major sources of self-efficacy: (a) mastery experiences – by successfully performing a task, it strengthened our sense of self-efficacy; (b) social modeling – witnessing others, similar to oneself, successfully completing a task raised one’s beliefs of their own capabilities; (c) social persuasion – receiving verbal encouragement assisted in overcoming self-doubt; and (d) psychological responses – our own response (e.g., moods, physical reactions, stress) impacted how a person felt about their personal abilities.

Student involvement theory. Astin, born May 30, 1932, and a former professor of Higher Education and Director of the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, authored 20 books and more than 300 journal articles in the field of higher education. His original study tried to identify why students did not persist in college. He concluded that in order for a program to be effective, it needed to elicit a student’s effort and investment of energy, which will lead to learning and development (Astin, 1984). In his theory, he posited student involvement is the amount of energy and time a student devoted to participating in student organizations, interacting with faculty and peers, studying, and using campus facilities (Astin, 1985a).
The theory of student involvement was grounded by a longitudinal study of college dropouts sought to identify factors in the college environment significantly affecting the student’s persistence in college (Astin, 1975). He proposed eight factors of involvement, which determined whether a student dropped out. These factors were: (a) place of residence (on or off campus), (b) involvement with faculty, (c) familiarity with the professor in a student’s field, (d) verbal aggressiveness, (e) academic involvement (study time, attitude), (f) involvement with research, (g) involvement in student government, and (h) athletic involvement. He concluded students not involved in these areas were more likely to drop out (Astin, 1975).

The student involvement theory challenged the very notion of academic excellence, rather than judging the educational excellence based on institutional reputation and resources. This theorist purported that high quality institutions should be judged according to the degree to which they maximize the intellectual and personal development of students (Astin, 1985b). Involvement also referred to what students actually did rather than what they thought, how they felt, and the meanings made of their experiences. The theory primarily focused on how students spent their time outside of the classroom and how the various institutional processes and opportunities promoted student development (Astin, 1985b). For example, a highly involved student was defined one who dedicated an ample amount of time to studying, participating in clubs and organizations, and finding opportunities to interact with faculty outside of the classroom (Astin, 1984).

Astin’s (1993) Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model, which was based on his research, offered a conceptual guide for understanding college student development.
Input referred to the student’s personal, educational, and background characteristics (e.g., academic preparedness, family income status, personal demographics, etc.) upon entering college. Environment referred to the exposure to the multitude of educational resources provided by the university, which influenced change. Astin (1993) identified the environmental variables in eight classifications: institutional characteristics, student peer group characteristics, faculty characteristics, curriculum, financial aid, major field choice, place of residence, and student involvement. Outcomes referred to the characteristics (e.g., ethical and moral development, retention, grades, graduation, etc.) of the students after exposed to the college environment.

Astin (1985b) further developed a theory of student development, which placed less focus on the educator and more on the students’ active participation in the learning process. The theory posited the following five basic postulates: (a) involvement referred to time invested in physical and psychological energy in various activities; (b) regardless of activity, involvement occurred along a continuum. Each student experienced different degrees of involvement at different times; (c) involvement had both quantitative and qualitative aspects; (d) the amount of student learning and personal development associated with an educational program correlated to the quality and quantity of student involvement in the activity; and (e) the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice was directly linked to how the policy or practice aimed to increase student involvement (Astin, 1985b).

Astin’s (1984) theory related to this study for several reasons. First, the theory had the ability to express what mattered in college, as well as the ability to explain the environmental pressures contributing to the development of a college student. The theory
also subscribed to a wide variety of sources such as psychoanalysis and classical learning theory. Researchers also used this theory to guide their investigations with administrators of student affairs and faculty assisted in the design of more effective learning environments (Astin, 1984).

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of the dissertation study was to add to the small but growing research on Black males who successfully enrolled, retained, and persisted towards graduation at a predominately White urban institution. Building upon Harper’s (2003, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2012) research through an anti-deficit achievement approach, the dissertation study examined the perceptions of the experiences realized by Black males who, in spite the odds, managed to succeed. The study used the setting of a predominately White urban university, which is ethnically diverse, to examine whether there were any differences in the experiences of these successful Black males as compared to those who attended predominately White and historically Black colleges and universities in Harper’s research. The intent of this study was to gain insight into the learning environment both in and outside of the classroom, which best engaged, retained, and helped the Black male students to persist towards graduation.

The extant literature separately focused on teaching methods and environments, self-efficacy, support, and student involvement as learning constructs linked to academic success (Bonaparte, 2009; Griffin, 2006; Harper 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008; Johnson, 2007; Lee, 2009; Palmer et al., 2011). The dissertation research brought together all four learning constructs, which were inextricably tied to the educational process of a Black male’s college experience (Yohannes-Reda, 2010). This study used Harper’s (2012)
framework to gain an understanding of how the Black males from St. John’s University successfully enrolled, retained, and persisted toward graduation. The study gathered information from the experiences of the participants about the teaching methods and environments which were more impactful to their learning, the specific motivations which helped them to maintain enrollment, the types of activities they participated in, the transferable skills they developed and used in the classroom, and their suggestions on what the university can do to assist more Black males to succeed in college. The study used the anti-deficit achievement approach because of the need for more research that presents a positive view on Black males succeeding in college (Harper, 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012).

Research Questions

This qualitative research project used an anti-deficit achievement perspective to examine the perceptions of successful Black college males and their experiences with successfully enrolling, retaining, and persisting towards graduation at a predominately White urban university. The dissertation study used semi-structured interviews to gather information from the participants about their experiences of the teaching methods and environments, the specific motivations that helped them to maintain enrollment, the types of activities they participated in, and the transferable skills they developed and used in the classroom. The following four questions guided the research.

1. What type of in-class teaching methods and environments had a significant impact on the learning of Black college males?

2. What are the specific non-cognitive factors that had a significant impact on Black college males?
3. What types of educationally purposeful activities/clubs enhance the in-class learning for Black college males?

4. What are some of the barriers that impede accomplishing persistence and graduation and to what degree can they be addressed through policy and practices invoked by university administrators?

**Significance of the Study**

Colleges and universities across the nation have been unable to address the issue of low enrollment, retention, and persistence of Black male students (Rovai et al., 2005). For those Black males enrolled into a college or university, 32% attained an Associate’s Degree, and 34% received a Bachelor’s Degree. The 2011 American Council on Education comparison report on degree attainment showed within a 10-year span, both White males and Black females had a significantly higher percentage of obtaining a college degree than their Black male counterparts (Kim, 2011). In examining the enrollment rates of Blacks as a whole, males lagged behind their female counterparts. The 2008 data also showed that 51% of Black males ages 15 to 24 with a high school diploma in 2008 will end up unemployed, incarcerated, or dead (Lee & Ransom, 2011; Palmer et al., 2011). Not focusing on engaging and retaining Black male undergraduates greatly affected the number of Black males with bachelor’s degrees and essentially narrowed the achievement gap between them and their White counterparts (Harper, 2009).

It is important to research Black male success, despite the historical, economic, educational, political, and racial factors, in order to improve the pipeline of African-American men pursuing degrees (Yohannes-Reda, 2010). The literature on the state of
Black men in college called for more research on those who were successfully enrolled, retained, and persisted towards graduation to better understand how to increase the persistence and graduation rates for Black men and other underrepresented groups (Fries-Britt, 1997; Harper 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012; Person & LeNoir, 1997). The extant literature separately focused on teaching methods and environments, self-efficacy, support, and student involvement as learning constructs linked to academic success (Bonaparte, 2009; Griffin, 2006; Harper 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008; Johnson, 2007; Lee, 2009; Palmer et al., 2011). The dissertation research brought together all four learning constructs, which were inextricably tied to the educational process of a Black male’s college experience (Yohannes-Reda, 2010).

By examining the lived experiences of successful Black college males at a predominately White urban institution, the dissertation research added to the existing body of knowledge on the subject and provided a voice for the Black men who have experienced college differently. The study provided an opportunity for supplementary discussions on the best practices college and university faculty and administrators should employ to engage, retain, and graduate Black males at a higher rate. The participants shared their experiences regarding preferred styles of learning, specific non-cognitive factors that had a significant impact on college career, and forms of involvement, which enhanced their learning process. The overall findings of the study added to the current research as it examined three learning constructs related to the successful retention, engagement, and graduation of Black males at a predominately-White urban institution in the northeast United States. These experiences were analyzed through the lens of social learning (cognitive) theories, which assert that people learn within a social context.
through cultural experiences, observation and imitation, and involvement (Astin, 1984; Bandura 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). Watson, Terrell, Wright, and Associates (2002) stated bridging best practices in student learning and development theory with cognitive development theory and pedagogical protocol serves to enhance student learning, growth, and development.

**Definitions of Terms**

**Academic success.** Completing courses with a grade of “B” (3.0) or better enabling the student to continue their postsecondary education (Flowers, 2006).

**Achievement gap.** The inequality in academic performance between groups of students most often used to describe the performance gap in standardized test scores, dropout rates, and college completion rates (Achievement Gap, 2004).

**African-American/Black.** For the purposes of this study, the term African American is interchangeable with the term Black, which refers to all persons who self-identify as Black/African-American/Afro-Caribbean.

**Engagement.** How actively involved or interested students appear to be in their learning process and the process of how they connect their classes, their institution, and each other (Axelson & Flick, 2010).

**Involvement.** The amount of energy and time a student devotes to participating in student organizations, interacting with faculty and peers, studying, using campus facilities (Astin 1985a).

**Chapter Summary**

The minority achievement gap in higher education is still the most urgent problem is facing the United States educational system (Rovai et al., 2005). Under-preparedness
and the lack of high quality pre-school and K-12 education are among the reasons why there is an achievement gap (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Rovai et al., 2005; Swaill, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Specifically, the enrollment and retention rates of Black males in college are critical (Ellis, 2009). Nationally, more than 68% of Black men who attend college do not graduate within six years, which accounts for the lowest college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education (Harper, 2006).

However, though dire statistics and research listed the grim realities of Black males in society and higher education, there are those Black males who are motivated to attend, succeed, and graduate from college regardless of the barriers and long standing negative caricatures (e.g. lazy, dis-engaged, underprepared) of Black students (Harper, 2006b, 2012). To learn how to help Black males succeed, it is imperative to speak to successful Black males about their positive collegiate experiences (Harper, 2012). So much research has provided disparaging reasons why Black males do not succeed, but there are a growing number of studies reframing the Black male college experience from an anti-deficit perspective (Aud et al., 2010; D’Augelli & Herschberger, 1993; Ellis, 2009; Harper, 2003, 2006b; Palmer et al., 2011; Schwitzer et al., 1999).

Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research on high-achieving Black males has provided a voice to those Black males who have successfully navigated through college and even pursued graduate and post-graduate degrees. Harper (2012) called for more research on successful Black males to counterbalance the negative stereotypes and statistics and to learn from these high-achieving students. The first theoretical framework, which guided the dissertation study, was Harper’s (2012) anti-
deficit achievement framework. His research sought to get a better understanding of how, in spite the odds, a small percentage of Black males were succeeding in college. Harper’s framework was the foundation of the dissertation study as it sought to identify the salient experiences of successful Black males at St. John’s University. It is important to note that Harper (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) called for more research on successful Black males in order to counterbalance the negative stereotypes and statistics and to learn from these high-achieving students.

The second framework was Vygotsky’s (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which stressed the connection between the individual, the environment, and social processes in the acquisition of knowledge (Brehm, Kassin, & Fein, 2005). Through this theoretical framework, the dissertation study uncovered the best teaching methods and environments for Black males to learn and succeed classroom. The third framework, Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory, posited a person’s belief about their capabilities influences their future behaviors and in turn produces outcomes, which self-fulfills their beliefs. Through positive reinforcement, one becomes more self-confident about their abilities to complete a task (Bandura, 1997). The ability to unravel known sources of self-efficacy beliefs can inform researchers and educators of ways to increase among all Black males (Yohannes-Reda, 2010). The dissertation research uncovered the specific non-cognitive factors that had a significant impact on these Black college males to provide a foundation for increasing achievement and success for all Black males. The fourth framework, Astin’s (1984) involvement theory, explained students learn the more they are involved in both the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience. Involvement in educationally purposeful activities outside of the classroom deeply influenced student
learning, development, and retention of Black males (Harper, 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012; Palmer & Young, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008, 2010). This theoretical framework was used to analyze the types of educationally purposeful activities/clubs that enhanced in-class learning for the participants in the study.

Through qualitative methods, the dissertation research expanded Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research and examined the perceptions of Black men enrolled at a predominately White university that is racially diverse. The intent of the study was to gain insight into the learning environment both in and outside of the classroom that best engaged, retained, and helped Black males to persist toward graduation. The study gathered information from the experiences of the participants about the teaching methods and environment, the specific motivations that helped them to maintain enrollment, the types of activities they participated in, and the transferable skills they developed and used in the classroom.

In Chapter 2 contains a review and analysis of current research and literature related to the topic. The theoretical framework provided in Chapter 1 guided the literature and research selected for this chapter. Chapter 3 outlines the research context, provides a description of the participants involved in the study, and the method through which the data was collected and analyzed. Chapter 4 provides the findings and a summary of the results. In Chapter 5, the findings are discussed along with any limitations and recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

Black males successfully enrolling, retaining, and graduating from college is a topic that is often not researched enough. The majority of the literature has focused on the maladjustments and the many factors precluding Black males from succeeding (Aud et al., 2010; D’Augelli & Herschberger, 1993; Ellis, 2009; Harper, 2003, 2006a; Palmer et al., 2011; Schwitzer et al., 1999). The purpose of the dissertation study was to add to the small but growing research on Black males who successfully enrolled, retained, and persisted towards graduation at a predominately White urban institution. Building on Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research through an anti-deficit achievement approach, the dissertation study examined the perceptions of the experiences realized by Black males who, in spite the odds, managed to succeed. The research used the setting of a predominately White urban university that is ethnically diverse to examine whether there were any differences in the experiences of these successful Black males as compared to those who attended a predominately-White or historically Black colleges and universities in Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research.

The intent of this research was to gain insight into the learning environment both in and outside of the classroom, which best engaged, retained, and helped the participants to persist towards graduation. The dissertation study included the collection and analysis of information from the experiences of the participants about the teaching methods and environment, the specific motivations, which helped them to maintain enrollment, the
types of activities they participated in, and the transferable skills they developed and used in the classroom. To gain insight into this phenomenon, a series of one-on-one interviews were conducted with Black men enrolled at St. John’s University to ascertain student perceptions of their experiences, which contributed to their academic success.

The literature review was guided by the four theories discussed in the theoretical framework in Chapter 1. Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework aimed to get a better understanding of how, in spite the odds, a small percentage of Black males were succeeding in college. This framework was the foundation of this study as it ventured to identify the salient experiences of successful Black males at St. John’s University. Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory described learning as being inextricably linked to social and cultural experiences with a focus on collaboration and cooperation. The literature described how collaborative learning and the use of diverse methods of teaching motivated and encouraged learning for Black males. Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory focused on how learning is a high social activity and through support and positive encouragement, a positive sense of self and accomplishment developed. The literature discussed the importance of how family and peer support determined success. Astin’s (1984) involvement theory discussed how involvement in educationally purposeful activities/clubs enhanced the learning occurring inside the classroom. The literature discussed how involvement promoted connections with peers, faculty, and other administrators on campus and provided a means of social integration and cultural exploration at the university.

The literature review examines research from four schools of thought. It begins with an overview of research on successful Black males from the theoretical lens of
Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement model. Following the review of Harper’s research, the literature review examines research on the most impactful teaching styles and learning environments, and the need and importance of support and involvement on campus as predictors for Black male college success through the critical lens of Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory (1997), and Astin’s (1984) involvement theory.

Review of Literature

**Harper’s anti-deficit achievement approach: How Black males succeed.**

Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research was reviewed because it used an anti-deficit achievement perspective. Harper’s perspective inverted questions commonly asked about educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and Black male student attrition. Within this perspective, Harper focused on highlighting the policies, programs, and resources, which support Black male success in college. He uncovered how involvement both in and out of the classroom afforded access to opportunities for leadership and involvement on campus. Harper’s framework is especially important because it provided a foundation for the dissertation study. Thus, in order to provide context to the literature review, this chapter begins with an overview of Harper’s research.

Through qualitative research, Harper (2003) interviewed 32 high-achieving African-American males from six predominately White institutions in the Midwest: University of Illinois, Indiana University, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, The Ohio State University and Purdue University. The participant selection criteria provided to high-ranking university officials who nominated the participants,
were Black males with the following attributes: a 3.0 grade point average, an established record of involvement in multiple organizations, earned admiration of peers (as determined by peer elections to campus leadership positions), developed meaningful relationships with faculty and high ranking campus administrators, participated in enriching educational experiences (e.g., student abroad, internship programs, learning communities, and summer research programs), and earned numerous awards and honors for college achievement (Harper, 2003).

Harper (2003) was interested in gaining insight into student perceptions on opportunities they believed were afforded to them due to their involvement in on-campus experiences. Harper examined the extent to which students benefitted from relationships they established with faculty and administrators and the extent to which their experiences contributed to the building of skills and competencies necessary to in-class learning. Through semi-structured individual interviews, Harper identified seven categories that captured the experiences of the 32 high achieving students. The categories were (a) success stimuli and support services, (b) involvement impetus, (c) uniqueness and underrepresentation, (d) perks and privileges, (e) practical competences, (f) stressors of professionalism, and (g) a love/hate relationship with their university.

Harper (2003) also found the 32 high achievers reported how their spiritual connection to God played a major role in their overall success. The support they received from their parents and peers were also major sources of motivation. The higher achievers felt indebted to the older student leaders who reached out to them while they were transitioning to college. That relationship and understanding of carrying on a legacy was ingrained through their involvement. The unique aspect of the high achievers was that
they represented a small portion of Black male students involved on campus. While their peers were focused on sports, dating, and hanging out, the study participants were focused on making a difference in their community and representing a population that was underrepresented.

The participants’ definition of high achieving differed from their respective peers. For the high achievers, instead of just grades, money, and material possessions, they identified campus involvement, community uplift, and long-term career success beyond the undergraduate years as indicators of achievement (Harper, 2003). Their views on masculinity meant taking care of business and preparing to be a leader in the community rather than dating, sexual records with women, sports, and other forms of competition. When discussing the opportunities afforded to them because of their involvement, they stated meaningful relationships with faculty and staff, being well known by the university president and other high-level administrators, participation in national conferences, meeting famous people and dignitaries, and access to merit scholarships because of their good grades and involvement.

The participants also identified basic proficiencies that were enhanced due to their involvement with peers, faculty, and administrators. They reported working with people from different cultural backgrounds, effectively managing time and juggling multiple tasks simultaneously, functioning productively in teams, comfortably communicating with individuals and large groups, delegating tasks to others, and successfully navigating the political environment. Participants expressed how these competencies positively transferred to their in-class learning and influenced their overall academic success (Harper, 2003). The high achievers also realized how hard it was to be held to a different
standard because of their involvement. They were viewed more as professionals rather than as a student and that role created an added stress for them. None of the participants regretted attending their university because they knew there were many resources available to them to succeed, but the lack of diversity and noticeable presence of racism and segregation was a point of contention (Harper, 2003).

In 2006, Harper used the data set collected from his 2003 study and interviewed 32 high-achieving African-American males from six predominately White institutions in the mid-west and using the same selection criteria from his research in 2003. His phenomenological study was intended to understand the perceptions of same-race peer support groups for college success and how peer relationships were negotiated. Through analysis of semi-structured interviews, Harper (2006b) identified three categories that emerged from his study: (a) peer support, (b) outlets for peer support, and (c) leveraging peer support. The findings from Harper’s study revealed peers played a significant role in academic success.

The high achievers participating in the study reported how the support of their peers significantly enhanced the quality of their experiences as high achieving Black males at predominately White universities. Their involvement and representation of a small group of Black male students, who were heavily involved and succeeding academically, proved to be beneficial in terms of peer recognition. The high achievers were involved in clubs and activities, which were designated as predominately Black student organizations. It was in these organizations where the students received same-race peer support. Other Black students depended on their involvement in order to support their agendas. In the group of 36 high achievers, 41% or 13 out of the 36 held
membership in one of the five national historically Black fraternities. The fraternity members valued a close-knit group of peers focused on achievement. By intentionally surrounding themselves with other successful Black males doing positive things on campus and staying away from trouble, this created an opportunity for enhanced peer support and accountability (Harper, 2006b). Harper (2006b) also found that the participants’ peers realized the high achievers were an asset to their cause and many of them provided support simply because they were Black, especially when they were involved in other predominately White student organizations and clubs (Harper, 2006). In sum, their involvement, and reputation for having character, being role models, leaders, and champions of the African–American student concerns on campus garnered a tremendous amount of support from their same race peers (Harper, 2006b).

Harper and Quaye (2007) re-examined the qualitative data from the 32 high-achieving African-American men who participated in Harper’s (2003) original study in order to determine what role racial identity played in the engagement in organizations, the factors that influenced these men to select either the mainstream or the culturally based organizations, and how these organizations supported an expression of Black identities among this population. Two main themes emerged. The first was, Black males were involved for the advancement of the African-American community, and the second was their ability for cross-cultural engagement and advocacy of oppressed people. The majority of the participants were primarily involved in predominately Black and minority organizations because they were committed to uplifting the Black community. The students explained how their participation provided opportunities to dispel stereotypes, break down barriers, and provide new opportunities for other African-American students
on campus (Harper & Quaye, 2007). The researchers found the high achievers were committed to responding to the many concerns of Black students and other minorities on campus, so they chose to affiliate with groups that responded directly to their needs and concerns. Those who chose to be a part of mainstream predominately-White student organizations did so because they wanted to fill the gap where there was an inadequate representation of African-Americans; they wanted to be the first to diversify, and these organizations had access to greater resources for programming. The participants saw this as a way to promote collaboration with Black student organizations and provided funding opportunities to support African-American and other minority initiatives (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Harper and Quaye (2007) also found that the participants indicated their involvement increased their ability to be involved in cross-cultural engagement and advocacy for oppressed people. They cited an enhancement of their cross-cultural communication skills, their ability to learn how to work with others from diverse backgrounds, and opportunities to teach others about their unique backgrounds, Black culture, and life histories. The high-achievers also had an opportunity to gain a heightened awareness of the effects of oppression on other marginalized groups (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Harper (2008) then shifted his attention to identifying what the high achievers in his 2003 study gained from their involvement on campus and how the relationships were negotiated at the six predominately White institutions. Harper re-examined the qualitative data from his original study, and the findings indicated the high achievers recalled special opportunities being offered to them such as dinners with high ranking
officials of the university, access to private scholarships and other opportunities to fund their college career, access to internships, and job opportunities. These opportunities were credited to the relationships built with top administrators. Harper’s (2008) study also indicated that older, more seasoned African-American leaders reached out to the participants early during their first year to connect them to top administrators to ensure connectivity and success.

In 2005, Harper (2012) started collecting data for the largest-known empirical investigation of Black male undergraduates. The study investigated the experiences of Black males in a variety of college and university settings. His National Black Male College Achievement Study included historically Black public universities, liberal arts colleges, highly selective research universities, public research universities, private historically black colleges and universities, and comprehensive state universities. In total, Harper (2012) gathered qualitative data from 219 successful Black males from 42 colleges and universities across the nation. The 30 predominately White institutions collectively enrolled approximately 322,000 full time students of which 2.9% of them were Black males. The 219 Black males included in the study had a 3.0 grade point average or higher, were highly involved on campus, developed meaningful relationships with faculty and administrators, participated in academic enrichment opportunities (e.g., study abroad, internships, service learning, etc.) and earned numerous merit-based scholarships. The population came from a diverse background, as evidenced by their demographics and family background. Approximately 57% of the participants grew up in households labeled low-income to working class (Harper, 2012).
The findings from Harper’s (2012) research resulted in four major categories: getting to college, choosing college, paying for college, and transitioning to college. The participants unanimously mentioned their family unit as integral in teaching them about the importance of going to college and how advanced education promoted upward mobility. About half of the students who participated had parents who had attained a bachelor’s degree. Even though half the parents had little or no firsthand experience with college, these parents promoted a college education as the only next step after high school. In comparison to their friends who were not in college, the parents of the participants sought educational resources (tutoring, summer bridge programs, summer academies, camps, etc.) to ensure their child’s success (Harper, 2003; 2012). These resources provided access and exposure to resources that would help them to be successful in a college setting.

Additional findings included participants choosing liberal arts and highly selective research schools because of their outstanding academic record, which allowed for academic scholarships. As a result of the scholarships, financial stress was not a burden for the students who participated in the study, which in turn meant they were able to focus on their academics (Harper, 2012). Transitioning into college was made easy through the interaction of upperclassmen as mentors, thereby ensuring that students became involved in the campus community, and the students learned how to respond productively to racism on their campuses (Harper, 2012). Despite low teacher expectations, insufficient academic preparation for college-level work, racist and culturally unresponsive campus environments, and the debilitating consequences of
severe underrepresentation, there were still Black males who successfully navigated through college toward degree completion (Harper, 2012).

The outcome of Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) work was the anti-deficit achievement framework derived from research on Black males in college, as well as theories from sociology, psychology, gender studies, and education (Harper, 2012). The anti-deficit achievement framework was built on Tinto’s (1993), Astin’s (1993) and Terenzini and Reason’s (2005) frameworks which considered how the pre-college experiences along with involvement, academically and socially, impacted student engagement and retention at a university (Astin, 1985a; Palmer & Young, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Harper’s framework focused specifically on Black male achievers, where he inverted questions that normally would be asked about the causes of the academic achievement gap of Black males and instead, focused on what has led to their success in college. The framework focused on three pipeline points that affected the overall college experience, retention, and degree attainment of a Black male.

**Harper’s three pipeline points.** Harper (2012) focused on the pre-college socialization and readiness (pre-college support programs, parental involvement and support, etc.), the college achievement (classroom experiences, out-of-class experiences, and enriching educational experiences) and the post-college success as salient points in determining a Black male’s college success. Within each pipeline, groups of research questions were provided for the purposes of future research to better understand Black male student success in college. Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research of Black males from an anti-deficit achievement perspective provided a balanced understanding of the lives of Black men in colleges and universities who have navigated successfully.
Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory: Optimal teaching styles and environments for Black male success. The sociocultural perspective explained learning being inextricably linked to social and cultural activities taking place through active social participation. Vygotsky (1978) argued learning does not occur because of development but rather, development occurs because of learning. However, in order to learn, one needs to introduce a task out of reach of one’s present abilities, and with guidance and support, learning occurs. The sociocultural approach has increasingly been used to understand learning and development of all students while placing culture at the core. There is a connection between the individual, the environment, and social processes in the acquisition of knowledge (Brehm et al., 2005). In order to examine the development, aptitude, or educational aptitude of a child, social ties need to be considered (Ivic, 1994). Vygotsky’s (1978) concept illustrated this view with the concept of the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development is the distance between what a person knows independently and the level of development possible under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. Through learning with the zone of proximal development, students increase their rate of development. Their interaction with each other allowed them to achieve thought processes they could not achieve alone.

Speech also plays an important role within Vygotsky’s (1978) model of learning. During his early research on cultural development, Vygotsky (1978) placed a child in problem-solving situations and assigned a task that was difficult to complete without a special technique invented either by the child or through the assistance of an adult researcher. He and his research team realized children not only solved a practical task through the use of sight and touch, but also with speech (Yasnitsky, 2012). It is through
this research, Vygotsky challenged Piaget’s stance on cognitive development and posited a child assigned ways of thinking through social interaction rather than organized methods of cognition (Yasnitsky, 2012).

Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory supported collaborative learning as a teaching practice because it suggested the need for social interaction in order to grasp information. He purported that by interacting with other people sharing ideas and concepts, the learner begins to grasp a global understanding of the information. Vygotsky (1978) thus posited that children learn through social interactions, imitation, and through the help of others (zone of proximal distance). In relating sociocultural theory to the dissertation study, the premise is that collaborative learning (working in small groups on assignments) needs to be a part of the teaching practices in order to maximize the learning potential of African-Americans (Bonaparte, 2009; Lee, 2009, Turner, 2007; Young, Wright, & Laster, 2005). The research has indicated that the use of a variety of teaching techniques, such as collaborative learning, has significantly increased the level of knowledge acquisition, impacted retention rates in school, and provided opportunities to learn from peers (Bonaparte, 2009; Lee, 2009, Turner, 2007).

Bonaparte (2009) sought to identify the techniques and practices that influenced the level of learning of Black students in predominately-White institutions. The study specifically focused on the question, what do faculty and students perceive as the most important influences to the classroom learning of African-American students in predominately White institutions. Through purposeful sampling, Bonaparte’s qualitative study included interviews of 20 full-time premier faculty members and 80 students from two public four-year institutions in the south. Purposeful sampling was used to identify
the faculty members because they would be able to provide pertinent information on the topic. The faculty respondents were current and past educators of excellence as designated by their institution, department, or state governing body. They were selected based on their teaching experience, course load, academic level of student, retention rate, and award winning status (Bonaparte, 2009). The student respondents were African-American students studying under one of the faculty members participating in the study. Once the faculty members were interviewed in groups, the field notes were examined for key themes. Bonaparte (2009) did not initially develop a protocol to interview the students; however, through his interactions with the students in the interviews, he developed the protocol and used it as the research progressed. To verify the data Bonaparte (2009) employed a review of the literature, inter-coder reliability, and member checks.

The findings of Bonaparte’s (2009) study revealed that faculty utilizing a variety of teaching techniques (e.g., collaborative learning, guest speakers, movie clips) motivated, encouraged, and stimulated their students to learn. The use of collaborative learning encouraged the students to interact and learn from their peers and faculty members in a non-threatening environment (Bonaparte, 2009). The students noted an open environment where students were free to have discussions and express their feelings on a topic greatly influenced their learning. It is important to note, the faculty members in Bonaparte’s (2009) study did not do anything different to benefit African-American students; rather, they utilized approaches focused on encouraging and benefiting all of their students. Although collaborative learning has been a preferred method of teaching,
perceived trust also is one of the important factors needed in working in collaborative
groups (Lee, 2009).

Lee’s (2009) qualitative case study examined the perceptions of 19 African-
American males on collaborative learning as a means to increase academic achievement
at a predominately White institution located in the southeast. To effectively capture their
experiences, Lee (2009) created a survey questionnaire, an interview protocol, and an
observation protocol. Data for this study was collected through focus groups, classroom
observations (through audiovisual equipment), phone calls, and individual interviews.
There were three classroom observations that were videotaped, before, during, and after
the interviews, and focus groups, in order to provide content and clarity on what was
being discussed. The first classroom observation created an opportunity for
trustworthiness of the data being collected and allowed the researcher to gain a basic
understanding of what occurred on a regular basis in the classroom environment (Lee,
2009).

Nine open-ended questions were used to identify the influence of collaborative
learning on faculty-student interactions, student-student interactions, and its potential
influence of isolation for African-American male students. The second observation
occurred after the first five individual interviews. This observation provided context for
what was being discussed during the first set of interviews. The third observation
occurred after all interviews and focus groups were completed. This observation was
more specific because it allowed the researcher to look and listen for specific details and
practices discussed during the interviews (Lee, 2009).
In order to maintain anonymity, codes and randomized ID numbers were used to represent the participants (Lee, 2009). Only students who were enrolled in or who had completed specific religion courses were selected because every student who planned to graduate from the institution was required to have completed these courses. Through content analysis and the use of ResearchWare, Hyper Research 2.8, a program used to analyze and code data, several subcategories emerged. When examining the codes for collaborative learning and the influence of faculty-student interactions, students expressed the willingness to talk with professors who were open and receptive to further enhance their interactions both in and outside of the classroom. The students also expressed their unwillingness to learn from a professor who only taught using lecture style as their main teaching practice. This format was seen as antiquated and non-engaging and caused the students to become disengaged in the learning process. The participants all agreed that learning required interaction, which made the learning easier, more exciting, and retained longer (Lee, 2009).

The researcher also analyzed the influence of collaborative learning on student-student interactions. The students perceived collaborative learning as valuable and necessary in the learning process and an effective teaching practice in increasing their academic success (Bonaparte, 2009; Lee, 2009; Turner, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). Although collaborative learning was an effective teaching practice, some of the participants indicated they would not want it to be the only means of instruction because it can be viewed as crippling, unnecessary, and be considered cheating in the classroom (Lee, 2009). This statement supported Bonaparte’s (2009) study, which suggested faculty should use a variety of teaching techniques (e.g. collaborative learning, guest
speakers, movie clips) to motivate, encourage, and stimulate students to learn. The participants also mentioned perceived trust as a concern for collaborative learning as some members of the group would seek to benefit from the work of others without contributing to the group (Lee, 2009).

Lee (2009) was also interested in identifying whether the use of collaborative learning in the classroom influenced the isolation of African-American males. The participants all explained that their race never played a role in the classroom, although they may have represented the Black race in the classroom due to the lack of diversity. They all agreed a person feeling isolated was to that person’s choosing because classroom sizes, the size of the campus, and the student-faculty ratio all encouraged engagement. The participants also mentioned how their involvement at the institution provided access to like-minded peers who were devoted to assisting African-Americans in need. This network of support reinforced their abilities to interact with diverse cultures inside the classroom, and therefore, they succeed both academically and socially.

Turner’s (2007) qualitative research study sought to examine the relationship between collaborative learning in the college classroom and the reported psychosocial attitudes of 20 disadvantaged African-American students admitted to New York State Public College between Fall 2005 and Fall 2006. The criterion used to determine whether a participant was disadvantaged was that they qualified for admission through New York State Public College’s Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), they were in need of financial assistance, and they met established income guideline (Turner, 2007). Face-to-face interviews were used to assess whether there was a difference in disadvantaged minority college students who reported an ability to attain academic
achievement, their social adjustment to college, their willingness to remain in college, and their self-perceptions and leadership abilities based on individual or collaborative learning environments (Turner, 2007).

Letters of invitation were sent to 20 participants who were registered in four courses focused on either collaborative learning or individual learning. Each class had a different set of students: Class A—collaborative learning—consisted of African-American freshmen matriculated in either two business administration associates degree program; Class B—collaborative learning—consisted of African-American males on academic probation; Class C—individual learning—consisted of African-American males matriculated in one of the business programs; and Class D—individual learning—consisted of African-American males matriculated in either two business administration associates degree program (Turner, 2007).

Data were collected through observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials, which elicited the participant’s opinions on course expectations, their reactions to the type of teaching strategy used in the course, their reactions to collaborative participation, and their feelings about being in a group (Turner, 2007). The data from the participants enrolled in the collaborative courses was compared to the data from the participants enrolled in the two courses using an individual approach to teaching. Through the use of HyperRESEARCH, a digital qualitative analysis software tool, nine themes emerged from the participants in the collaborative class. Students reported (a) increased satisfaction and achievement of goals in a collaborative class, (b) they maintained a positive self-concept and realistic self-appraisal about performance, (c) a greater interest to remain in college, (d) increased levels of learning and leadership skills,
(e) they learned more through group interaction and discussions, (f) when collaboration did not exist, their interactions with their faculty members were invaluable, (g) relevancy to course materials which led to an increased level of satisfaction and achievement, (h) positive effect on academic and cognitive development, knowledge acquisition, interpersonal skills, and clarity in educational goals, and (i) positive effect on students attitudes towards using institutional resources (Turner, 2007).

**Bandura’s self-efficacy theory: Non-cognitive factors contributing to Black male success.** Self-efficacy theory, which originated from social cognitive theory, describes a person’s belief about how their capabilities influenced their future behaviors and in turn produced outcomes, which self-fulfilled their beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Bandura, Jeffery, and Wright’s (1974) research on subjects with a phobia of snakes proved that through modeling and self-directed practice, a higher sense of self-efficacy was achieved. Bandura et al.’s research was conducted using participants recruited through an article in the local newspaper looking for participants with a phobia of snakes. The total number of participants who responded to the article was 36, of which four were male. The age range of the participants was from 17-47, with a mean age of 32 (Bandura et al., 1974).

All of the participants refused to go camping, hiking, fishing, and swimming in lakes due to their phobia. They were all administered pretreatment measures, which consisted of an attitudinal measurement and a behavioral avoidance task. The participants were first administered six attitude scales measuring their enjoyment or their strong dislike of snakes. They were then asked to perform 29 increasingly threatening tasks involving a three-foot boa constrictor (Bandura et al., 1974). During the 29
interactions with the snake, participants were asked verbally as they were performing the task, to rate their level of fear on a scale from 1-10. At the end of the pretest, participants were asked to complete a fear inventory consisting of 20 items in each of the following five classes of fear: animals, social situations and interpersonal behavior, physical afflictions and injuries, classical phobias, and a collection of miscellaneous fears. They were then administered the attitudinal measurement to evaluate any changes in thought based on the actual interactions with the snake (Bandura et al., 1974).

All of the participants returned in a week and were placed in triads to once again perform a series of tasks with the snake. Each triad was introduced to one level of induction aid treatments. The high induction aid consisted of the triad having the researcher hold the snake securely and then asking them to touch the snake. If they were unable to perform the task, a performance aid, such as heavy-weight gloves, was introduced to assist them. In the moderate induction aid, facilitators modeled the task and maintained partial rather than full control of the snake. For those participants who were administered the low induction aid, facilitators modeled the task and had no control over the snake (Bandura et al., 1974). Within each triad, treatment was administered until one of the group successfully completed the task. The participants returned in about a week and were administered the same pretest measures. The results of their study indicated the more they were aided, the more confident they were with interacting with the snake. Bandura et al. (1974) surmised that there was an increased change in behavior through modeling, self-directed practice, and a reinforcement of self-efficacy.

The cognitive theory of self-efficacy explains a student will be motivated to persist when they believe their actions produced positive outcomes (Bandura, 1997).
Self-efficacy has proven to be essential to improvements in the student’s method of learning and has played an essential role in their motivation to achieve (Zimmerman, 2000). The ability to unravel known sources of self-efficacy beliefs could inform researchers and educators in increasing achievement among all Black males (Yohannes-Reda, 2010). Kunjufu (2001) believed African-American males are in a crisis, which has been related to the lack of African-American role models, support systems, and low-self esteem. He also believed a strong family background, less negative peer pressure, and higher educational expectations greatly influenced the success of African-American males. Having a strong supportive relationship with faculty, staff, and peers on campus has been associated with higher levels of satisfaction with college for Black men (Bonaparte, 2009; Lee, 2009; Palmer & Young, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008; Turner, 2007).

The research has indicated Black males need to be a part of a supportive and encouraging environment in order to enhance their academic experience (Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2003; Harris, 2007; Moore, 2001; Palmer et al., 2011). This support, according to the research, manifests itself in a number of ways, such as providing a variety of teaching strategies, peer-to-peer/faculty-to-student support, and family support, which all significantly impacts the learning experience of Black males in college (Bonaparte, 2009; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2003; Harris, 2007; Lee, 2009; Moore, 2001; Palmer et al., 2011; Turner, 2007). Peer-to-peer and student-faculty relationships were strong determinants of academic success for African-Americans (Bonaparte, 2009; Harper, 2003; Lee, 2009; Turner, 2007). Continuing with this research information, it was noted that peer groups provided an important source of support and guidance through the rigorous academic climate of a college environment. The peer group provided both academic and social
support and an opportunity for the sharing of ideas and strategies to be successful in the college environment (Bonaparte, 2009; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Lee, 2009; Turner, 2007).

Harris’ (2007) qualitative research set out to assess the impact of mentoring in encouraging persistence among 12 African-American males in their junior or senior year at a predominately White public institution in the eastern region of the United States. Specifically, the study was interested in assessing whether current successful African-American males were greatly influenced by and persisted through college due to mentoring. The criteria for selecting the participants included African-American males who were either juniors or seniors and in good standing as indicated by a 2.0 grade point average. Twenty-two potential participants responded to the letter inviting them to participate in the study. Harris (2007) randomly selected 12 of the 22 respondents after assigning them numbers and pseudonyms. Data were collected through a demographic questionnaire and one face-to-face interview with each participant using 13 open-ended questions.

Harris (2007) used a proxy during the interview process because he worked at the university where the research was being conducted. Since the study aimed to identify certain cultural patterns in African-American males who were successful in college, an ethnographic approach was used to discover how the participants interpreted the cultural meaning of mentoring. In order to examine the cultural relevance, a domain analysis worksheet was used to help visualize the structure of each domain. Harris (2007) then created a taxonomy analysis to investigate the cultural domains for understanding the
participant’s viewpoint on whether mentoring had an influence on persistence at a predominately-White university.

The results indicated mentoring with peers who knew and understood the college system was beneficial to the persistence of these students at the university. Mentoring also played a role in developing supportive relationships with faculty and staff and eventually joining organizations. Mentoring relationships helped with overcoming many academic and social challenges a student confronts in college (Harris, 2007). The participants verified that mentoring influenced their academic success, confidence, self-concept, and higher self-esteem. Mentoring also kept them focused and motivated to succeed in college. Harris (2007) also reported 11 of the 12 participants stated the family played a significant role in their academic success.

Griffin’s (2006) qualitative study of nine Black students enrolled in the Honors Program at a large research university on the east coast sought to identify their sources of motivation and perceptions of how those sources contributed to academic achievement. Since this was a sociological multi-case study, the data from each participant was collected as an individual case study to analyze the comparisons between each participant and to increase the validity of the findings (Griffin, 2006). Through purposeful methods the nine participants were selected in order to provide the most insight into the study. The students who participated in the Honors Program needed to meet the requirement of a 3.0 grade point average and 1,200 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). The participants consisted of six women and three men from the ages of 18-23 with diverse family backgrounds in degree attainment and family income (Griffin, 2006). All of the students filled out a demographic questionnaire before being interviewed and were
assigned a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. Griffin (2006) designed the interview protocol based on the literature on the challenges and experiences of gifted Black students. The questions sought to identify the students’ sources of motivation, identify their feelings with transitioning academically, views on stereotyping, and the factors that served as barriers to their success.

Through manual coding, the findings indicated that all of the participants shared common themes when identifying the motivators in their lives. The students identified both internal and external sources of motivation that helped them to succeed. Participants explained how self-motivation and desire for future career goals and aspirations helped them to stay focused. They expressed that their motivation was first internally developed and played a major role in their success. They also mentioned how their parents and families instilled the very notion of going to college, succeeding academically, and experiencing life’s options from the very beginning (Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2003; Harris, 2007). Some of the participants even mentioned their parent’s approval as a source of motivation. The participants also credited their racial background as a motivator because they wanted to challenge stereotypes and become a source of pride for the Black community. They yearned to dispel any myths regarding Black students and college underachievement. Another external motivator for the participants was the academic challenges encountered. Although some of the participants recalled external reasons for their academic hardships, such as lack of knowledge or familiarity with the subject, poor high school preparation, or poor teaching skills, they realized the outcome was controlled by their behavior. They did not acquiesce to these challenges but rather those challenges motivated them to succeed (Griffin, 2006).
In addition to Griffin’s (2006) study, Palmer et al.’s (2011) qualitative research aimed to identify the factors that 11 academically underprepared Black males, who entered an Historically Black College or University (HBCU) through a remedial program and persisted to gradation, attributed to their success. The study took place at a public doctoral research HBCU in a mid-Atlantic state. The participants were traditional aged college students with a mean grade point average of 2.7. Prior to participating in a face-to-face interview, the participants filled out a demographic questionnaire and a consent form to allow the researchers to contact the director of the remedial program who tracked the academic success of the participants.

Palmer et al. (2011) used open-ended questions to gain a better understanding of the participants’ academic and social experiences at the university. Follow-up phone conversations occurred after the notes and the audio recordings were reviewed to either clarify or elaborate on a theme discussed during the interviews. ATLAS-ti (5.0), a qualitative data management software program was used to better organize, manage, and code the data. Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of the participants of the study. The findings of the study produced two themes around the sources of motivation (Palmer et al. 2011). First, the family member’s modeled the importance of going to college for the purpose of attaining both a baccalaureate degree and a post-baccalaureate degree. The family members shared their experiences with college and actively supported the students throughout their academic journey. Second, although some of the participant’s family members lacked the educational background and experience, they still were effective in motivating and supporting them (Palmer et al., 2011).
Participants in both Griffin’s (2006) and Palmer et al.’s (2011) studies credited family support as a salient factor for academic success. The families provided motivation, an early desire to be academically successful, and role modeling to impress upon them the significance of an education (Griffin, 2006; Palmer et al., 2011). These findings are consistent with Bandura’s (1997) social cognitive theory of self-efficacy, which referred to positive reinforcement provided in the environment, as well as, receiving verbal encouragement to assist in overcoming self-doubt and increasing self-efficacy. As research showed (Bandura, 1997; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2003; Harris, 2007; Palmer et al., 2011), support through positive reinforcement and verbal encouragement increased self-efficacy, academic success, retention, and graduation rates of African-American males in college.

**Astin’s involvement theory: The positive effects of Black male involvement.**

Astin’s (1984) involvement theory was concerned with how college students spent their time and how various institutional processes and resources provided opportunities for student development and success. The theory stated students learned more the more they were involved in both the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience (Astin, 1993). Active involvement in out-of-class activities not only created opportunities for students to interact with peers and faculty, but it also influenced persistence, educational aspirations, completion of a bachelor’s degree, and subsequent enrollment in graduate school (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The quality and quantity of the student's involvement in the campus community also greatly influenced the amount of student learning and development obtained (Astin, 1984).
Astin (1993) was interested in identifying the factors in the college environment that significantly impacted student persistence in college. His national study consisted of 243,156 first-year students entering college in the fall of 1985. Astin (1993) used the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), a national survey which gathered information on student characteristics, parental income and education, demographic information, financial aid, achievements and activities in high school, career plans, values, attitudes, and beliefs. In 1989, a follow-up survey was administered, and it yielded 4,093 student respondents. Other data collected for this study included but was not limited to enrollment rates, finances, degrees earned, and faculty salaries. Information on the environment was obtained through a survey of all faculty members teaching at 217 of the 309 four-year institutions that participated in the study (Astin, 1993). Through cluster analysis, the research posited that all forms of involvement significantly influenced a student’s decision to persist in college. Astin proposed eight factors of involvement, which determined whether a student dropped out. These factors were (a) place of residence (on or off campus), (b) involvement with faculty, (c) familiarity with the professor in a student’s field, (d) verbal aggressiveness, (e) academic involvement (study time, attitude), (f) involvement with research, (g) involvement in student government, and (h) athletic involvement. He concluded students not involved in these areas were more likely to drop out (Astin, 1975).

Astin’s (1993) Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model (1993), which was based on his research, offered a conceptual guide for understanding college student development. Input referred to the student’s personal, educational, and background characteristics (e.g., academic preparedness, family income status, personal
demographics, etc.) upon entering college. Environment referred to the exposure to the multitude of educational resources provided by the university, which influenced change. Astin (1993) identified the environmental variables in eight classifications: institutional characteristics, student peer group characteristics, faculty characteristics, curriculum, financial aid, major field choice, place of residence, and student involvement. Outcomes referred to the characteristics (e.g., ethical and moral development, retention, grades, graduation, etc.) of the students after exposed to the college environment. According to Astin (1975), one major limitation of the study was that there was no separate subgroup analysis based on gender, race, ability, or socioeconomic status.

Black males who are involved on campus gained skills in decision-making, time management, working with diverse populations, and teamwork, which are transferable to the classroom setting (Harper, 2003; Johnson, 2007). However, the quality and quantity of the student's involvement in the campus community, also greatly influenced the amount of student learning and development obtained (Astin, 1984; Bowie, 2006). Involvement in educationally purposeful activities outside of the classroom deeply influenced learning, development, racial identity, and retention for Black males (Astin, 1975; Bowie, 2006; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper, 2012; Johnson, 2007). Involvement on campus provided the best opportunities for Black males to be connected to the university and, therefore, created a network of support with faculty, administration, and peers (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper, 2003; Johnson, 2007).

Bowie’s (2006) quantitative study examined the correlation between involvement and persistence for a random sample of 148 first-year Black males categorized as persisters and non-persisters. He was interested in identifying specific factors around
those students who maintained enrollment at the university and those who did not. The students in the study attended a predominately-White university in the South. The research study used the online version of the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) (1998), which was designed to measure the quality interactions with university resources a student experienced while in school, the students’ perceptions of how diversity was incorporated in the educational goals of the university, and the students’ perceptions of how their achievements assisted them towards several learning outcomes. The instrument also measured the frequency a student used university resources like the library and the student union. The instrument collected demographic information, their experiences and interactions with university resources, facilities, faculty, student organizations, and their overall gains from their experiences (Bowie, 2006). In addition, the study sought to determine whether student engagement as defined by the CSEQ, significantly improved the institutions ability to predict persistence.

The CSEQ was divided into sections interested in capturing demographic information, involvement in college activities, measure conversations, reading/writing, opinions about college, the college environment, and estimate of gains. For the purpose of the study, Bowie (2006) only analyzed the college activities portion, which measured student use of the library, computer and information technology, course learning, writing experiences, experiences with faculty, arts, music, and theater, campus facilities, clubs and organizations, personal experiences, interactions with student acquaintances, and scientific and quantitative experiences.

Bowie (2006) used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPPS), and through logic regression five themes emerged: (a) level of academic challenge—students
enjoyed being challenged and by setting high expectations in class, students usually meet or exceed them; (b) active and collaborative learning—students learn more when they are involved in the learning process and have the opportunity to engage in open discussions with their peers and faculty member; (c) student interactions with faculty—quality interactions outside of the classroom focused on personal development, academic performance, and involvement opportunities greatly impacted their experience; (d) enriching educational experience—opportunities to engage in conversations with diverse groups and using technology to enhance information literacy skills; and (e) supportive campus environment—having the knowledge and access to campus resources to further develop skills and creating an environment, which encourages support of students (Bowie, 2006).

Findings from the study indicated Black males who persisted were more active on campus, spent more time studying and reading outside of class, and had positive student-faculty interactions. According to Bowie (2006), the two statistically significant scales that had the most impact on Black male involvement and persistence were the combined effects of library usage and course learning (Bowie, 2006). Bowie’s work indicated that Black males should be introduced early to the library and other sources of information in order for it to positively influence their academic career. Furthermore, they should use the library as a quiet place to study, do research, ask the librarian for assistance, and look for other on-campus resources to help motivate them to succeed (Bowie, 2006). Black males also increased their persistence rate if they were actively involved in the classroom environment through open discussions, read all assignments, took detailed notes, and worked on projects that required a variety of resources (Bowie, 2006). Furthermore,
according to Bowie’s study, faculty need to be more cognizant of the role they play in facilitating an active classroom environment and its impact on Black male persistence and graduation (Bowie, 2006).

Tinto (1993) suggested that students must distance themselves from past associations and traditions in order to become integrated in their new college environment. However, Guiffrida’s (2003) qualitative study of 88 African-American undergraduates from a mid-sized White research institution in the northeast refuted Tinto’s hypothesis. Guiffrida’s study sought to understand the role of African-American student organizations in promoting social integration at a predominately-White university. The sample consisted of 45% males and 55% females across all class designations that were both actively involved and not so actively involved in African-American organizations. Several focus groups were held to capture data regarding what the participants believed were assets and perceived liabilities to their success at college (Guiffrida, 2003). Follow-up in-person interviews were conducted to expand the themes generated during the focus groups. The participants were given an opportunity to discuss both their assets to their college experience and their perceived stumbling blocks that impeded their success. The participants consistently mentioned different themes around faculty, academic advisors, families and involvement in Black organizations as both assets and stumbling blocks (Guiffrida, 2003).

With the help of QUALOG, a software application used to manage and organize textual data, Guiffrida’s (2003) findings indicated, although students participated in a variety of student organizations with different missions and purposes, all of the students reported their involvement promoted social integration through the development of out-
of-class connections with faculty members. The participants realized that their involvement with African-American organizations provided more opportunities for them to interact with African-American faculty members who were actively involved in the organization (Guiffrida, 2003). These interactions were considered invaluable because it established connections with people of power at the university. The participants realized their involvement in African-American organizations also helped create meaningful relationships with other African-Americans and therefore further enhanced social integration. Participation in these organizations also provided students with a greater sense of comfort because they shared similar interests, created an outlet to discuss their frustrations of being a minority, and provided opportunities for them to socialize comfortably (Guiffrida, 2003).

Johnson’s (2007) research also disagreed with Tinto’s hypothesis and asserted a student’s background and racial identity were positively related to engagement in educationally purposeful activities. The quantitative correlation design sought to determine the relationships between background experiences, racial identity, and engagement in educationally purposeful activities for 253 African-American students at a predominately White doctoral/research public institution in the Midwest (Johnson, 2007). Johnson compared the results from the 2006 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which assessed the experiences of college students’ involvement in educational programs linked to learning and development, and the 2000 Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS), a psychological instrument which measured the theoretical constructs associated with African-American racial identity. The researcher also used a respondent
demographic profile survey and student records maintained by the university to supplement the data (Johnson, 2007).

One year prior to the study, Johnson (2007) conducted a pilot mixed-method study to identify the potential background predictors of engagement, the limits of survey research, and the means to gather a sufficient sample of students for the study. The study involved 20 African-American undergraduates at a large, public, predominately-White, research institution who participated in semi-structured interviews. Cognitive interviews, which allowed the respondent to describe what they were thinking as they completed a survey, were used to validate the 2006 NSSE. While the NSSE was designed to measure activities during college, the Black students were describing factors that occurred prior to their entry to college (Johnson, 2007). Some of the emerging themes were access (financial aid and academic preparation), choice (expectations and supportive campus environment, and background (racial identity and foundations).

Johnson (2007) concluded that student background and racial identity were positively related to engagement in educationally purposeful activities. Student involvement in these types of activities increased their engagement with peers and faculty outside of the classroom and in turn positively impacted their persistence at the university. Students who participated in summer bridge programs also created a foundation for faculty-student contact, and students who were involved in two or more ethnic organizations and Black Greek-letter organizations participated in more educationally enriching opportunities on campus and desired a broader comprehension of ideas and concepts. Johnson also noted that these organizations provided a connection to the students’ culture and created an outlet for students to be comfortable in an
environment where they were the minority. Furthermore, the research found that predominately-White institutions can improve engagement for African-Americans through exposure to activities related to their home communities, designing programs and services which intentionally exposed African-American students to multiple cultural lenses, and encouraging African-American students at predominately-White institutions to make connections befitting of their personal values.

Chapter Summary

The phenomenological dissertation study contributes to the small but growing number of studies focused on those Black males who have excelled academically and socially on their campuses (Harper, 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012). The dissertation study analyzed the experiences of successful Black college males at an urban predominantly-White institution in the northeastern United States. The focus of the study was to identify the best learning environments both in and outside of the classroom that engaged, retained, and graduated Black males. The study also sought to reveal the non-cognitive factors that significantly influenced these students. The study also was intended to provide school administrators and faculty with more information regarding the support systems needed to increase the likelihood of academic success among Black males who attend predominantly-White institutions of higher education.

Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research on successful Black college males was from an anti-deficit achievement perspective. From this perspective, his studies focused on highlighting the persons, policies, programs, and resources that supported Black male success in college. Harper uncovered how involvement both in and out of the classroom afforded access to opportunities for leadership and involvement
on campus. Harper’s (2003) phenomenological study of the benefits of involvement afforded to 32 high-achieving African-American males from six predominately White institutions in the mid-west provided a platform for analyzing African-American males in college from an anti-deficit achievement perspective. His original research focused specifically on involvement, while the dissertation research adds both teaching and learning environments and self-efficacy as determinates of academic success for Black college males. The dissertation study used the setting of a predominately-White urban university, which is ethnically diverse, to examine whether there were any differences in the experiences of these successful Black males as compared to those who attended a predominately-White or historically Black colleges and universities in Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research.

The literature review examined the topic from the perspective of four theoretical frameworks: Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework, Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory, and Astin’s (1984) involvement theory. Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research was from an anti-deficit achievement perspective, which focused on highlighting the persons, policies, programs, and resources that supported Black male success in college. Harper uncovered how involvement both in and out of the classroom afforded access to opportunities for leadership and involvement on campus, as well as scholarships, internships, and job opportunities. His research explained Black males were involved in both ethnic and mainstream organizations because they wanted to invest their time directly affiliated to African-American student needs and to provide a voice for Black students in areas where representation was lacking. His research also stressed the importance of same-race peer
support groups and family support as major contributors to the academic success of Black males.

Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory defines learning as something inextricably linked to the experiences of the learner and emphasizes people sharing concepts in order to learn from each other, which is the very foundation of collaborative learning. Vygotsky’s (1978) named the distance between what a person knows independently and the level of potential development under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers the zone of proximal development. He posited that it is the learning with the capable peers or the adult that increases an individual’s rate of development because it is the interaction with each other that allowed them to achieve thought processes they could not achieve alone. Although collaborative learning has been associated with increased levels of learning, development, and satisfaction, it also has been viewed as crippling and cheating the system if used as an only means to teach (Lee, 2009; Turner, 2007). Thus, the research literature also presented an argument for a variety of teaching techniques (e.g. group work, guest speakers, movie clips) to motivate, encourage, and stimulate learning for African-American students (Bonaparte, 2009; Lee, 2009). To assist African-American students in their achievement, faculty need to provide opportunities for oral expression, diversify their teaching methods, and even think about moving outside the walls of the classroom to link learning to real-life situations (Bonaparte, 2009; Lee, 2009, Turner, 2007).

Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory was based on a person’s belief in their abilities to complete a task based on previous experiences and positive reinforcement. Bandura (1997) suggested that increased levels of self-efficacy lead to greater academic
performance, increased motivation to persist, and development of aspirations. The research argued that to enhance academic experience; Black males need to be a part of a supportive and encouraging environment (Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2003; Harris, 2007; Moore, 2001; Palmer et al., 2011). This support, according to the research, manifests itself in a number of ways, such as providing a variety of teaching strategies, peer-to-peer/faculty-to-student support, and family support, which all significantly impacts the learning experience of Black males in college (Bonaparte, 2009; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2003; Harris, 2007; Lee, 2009; Moore, 2001; Palmer et al., 2011; Turner, 2007). For African-American males, non-cognitive factors such as a realistic sense of self, a sense of belonging, and support from peers and family members are better predictors of success (Griffin, 2006; Harris, 2007; Palmer et al., 2011). Furthermore, the research indicated that even though the parents did not attend college, they still played a pivotal role in supporting the success of their students through positive reinforcement, which translated into greater levels of confidence, efficacy, and motivation (Bandura, 1997; Harper, 2003; Harris, 2007; Palmer et al., 2011).

Astin’s (1984) involvement theory focused on the activities and resources students interact with on a daily basis, which ultimately enhances their rate of retention at an institution. Astin (1984) posited that involvement in educationally purposeful activities/clubs enhanced the learning occurring inside the classroom. Students who were involved in activities and clubs enhanced a variety of skill sets they then applied in the classroom (Astin, 1984). The theory promoted involvement as a means of connecting to the institution and greatly impacted retention and graduation rates. Astin (1984) argued an institution should not only be judged based on reputation and resources but rather take
into account the degree to which they maximize the intellectual and personal development of students (Astin, 1985b).

The research literature stated activities students engage in outside of the classroom ultimately reinforced what a student learned in the classroom (Astin, 1984; Bowie, 2006; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper 2012). The research also stated that Black males who engaged in educationally purposeful activities outside of the classroom were more academically successful, afforded greater opportunities and connections on campus, and increased persistence (Bowie, 2006; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper, 2003, 2005; Harper & Quayle, 2007; Johnson, 2007). For Black males involvement in student organizations helped with social integration at predominately-White universities, promoted out-of-class connections with faculty and peers, and encouraged the concept of giving back to the Black community at-large (Bowie, 2006; Guiffrida, 2003; Johnson, 2007). Black males who chose to join predominately-Black organizations did so because they wanted to connect with peers who looked like them and focus on issues concerning the Black community (Bowie, 2006; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper, 2003; Johnson, 2007). The literature makes the case for colleges and universities to intentionally focus on the types of involvement for the benefit of successfully enrolling, retaining, and graduating African-American students.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

The research on Black males in college have focused on low high school graduation rates, even lower college enrollment/retention rates, the maladjustment to a college environment, and racial climates as factors which precluded them from succeeding and graduating (Aud et al., 2010; D’Augelli & Herschberger, 1993; Ellis, 2009; Harper, 2003, 2006; Palmer et al., 2011; Schwitzer et al., 1999). In spite of the dismal persistence and graduation rates African-American men, there has been a small presence of Black males who manage to succeed and graduate with four years. Through qualitative methods, this study expanded Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research by offering insight into the experiences these men about the teaching methods and environments which significantly impacted their learning, the specific motivations that helped them to maintain enrollment, the types of activities they participated in outside of the classroom, and the transferable skills they developed and used in the classroom. The participants also had the opportunity to discuss obstacles that impeded their success and offered insight on how the university could effectively manage the concerns of Black male retention and graduation through university policy and practices.

Information was gathered through 13 individual interviews, one focus group consisting of three students, and examination of archival data. The 16 students who participated in the study met the general requirements of a 3.0 grade point average or higher and were on track to graduate from St. John’s University. The archival data
assisted in examining demographic information such as place of residence and financial aid packages; this information provided context to the participants’ overall experience. It was also necessary in order to compare the experiences of the participants to Harper’s (2012) participants who did not have financial burdens because they received scholarships and grants. The participants’ experiences were analyzed through the lens of Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement perspective and three social learning (cognitive) theories, which asserted people learn within a social context through cultural experiences, observation and imitation, support, and involvement (Astin, 1984; Bandura, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978).

The research questions guiding this study were

1. What type of in-class teaching methods and environments had a significant impact on the learning of Black college males?
2. What are the specific non-cognitive factors that had a significant impact on Black college males?
3. What types of educationally purposeful activities/clubs enhance the in-class learning for Black college males?
4. What are some of the barriers that impede accomplishing persistence and graduation and to what degree can they be addressed through policy and practices invoked by university administrators?

Results of this study created an opportunity for supplementary discussions on the best practices colleges and universities should employ in order to successfully engage, retain, and graduate Black males. This chapter contains a description of the methodology used in this study, a brief description of the location of the study and the participants, the
instruments used in data collection, and the procedures used to interpret the data.

Attention is also given to the role of the researcher in this study due to positionality.

Since this study was interested in investigating how successful Black males enrolled, retained, and persisted towards graduation, a qualitative research design was the preferred method because it empowered the research participants to share their experiences (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research designs provide more detailed descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants rather than the survey completion and analyzing statistical data found in quantitative research studies (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research methods provided insight into the meaning behind their experiences and encouraged students to freely provide an unqualified assessment of campus life (Manning, 1992). A qualitative researcher is interested in understanding how people make sense of the experiences they have in regards to a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998), and phenomenology is an interpretive process in which the researcher listens to the lived experiences of the participants and then makes meaning of the lived experience (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenological research was required to understand the participants’ worldview while prior beliefs of a phenomenon are temporarily set aside in order to appreciate the elements of the experiences (Merriam, 1998).

For phenomenological research the primary method of data collection is through in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2007). Through this method, data collection provided richly descriptive and true perspectives of the students (Manning, 1992). This process allowed for exploration of the underlying reasons why these specific Black males were succeeding in college. In this approach, interviewers used open-ended questions to assist the participants in reconstructing their experiences with the topic of study. Open-ended
questions assisted in drawing out the salient points of their experiences and resulted in the identification of common themes, patterns, or variables (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006). It was important to gather the data from the in-depth interviews and present it with enough detail and sufficient depth, which allowed those who read the study to fully connect to that experience and deepen their understanding of the issues reflected (Seidman, 2006).

**Reflectivity: Personal relationships explained.** It has been important to focus on the concept of reflectivity since the researcher is a mid-level Black male administrator in Student Affairs at the location of the study. Reflectivity refers to when the researcher is placed at the center of the data being analyzed and draws from a variety of biographical aspects like values, ethnicity, personal status, gender, and so on. As they apply to the researcher (Mezirow, 1981). As an administrator in Student Affairs for over 13 years, the researcher has come into contact with numerous students at the university. The position of Associate Dean for Student Development, which is the position this researcher held at the time of the research, played a major role with the first-year student experience and overall student programming. The nature of this position offered a unique opportunity to relate to the students and created an environment of trust where students were comfortable with offering authentic information. Other strengths included a common experience of success, shared ethnicity and gender of the participants and the researcher, and an understanding of the environment. Researchers who have studied a population, to which they belong, have an advantage because they are able to use knowledge of the group in order to gain a better understanding in their assessment. This insider knowledge
also helped in sustaining authenticity because it allowed for a better comprehension and an ability to relate with the issues being discussed (Taylor, 2005).

On the other hand, the position of Associate Dean for Student Development created a vulnerability to bias the research. In qualitative research, researchers must identify their own biases and articulate their assumptions of the study based on their experiences (Janesick, 2000). Creswell (2007) suggested that a description of their experiences with the phenomenon should occur in order to set aside personal experiences, assumptions, or prejudices so the focus can be directed to the participant in the study. This critical self-reflection known as epoche refers to the suspension of judgment regarding what is real (Moustakas, 1994). Prior to the start of all interviews, the researcher provided a short biography on his experiences at the university to create a sharing environment and to build rapport with the participants. Building rapport with the participants was extremely important in order to obtain valid and trustworthy information. When rapport is established with the interviewee, the relationship is marked by confidence and trust (Glesne, 1999).

Research Context

St. John's University was founded in 1868, by the Vincentian Fathers of the Roman Catholic Church to provide the poor youth of the city with an intellectual and moral education. The university has been known for its academic programs, diverse student body, and for giving students the knowledge, skills, and confidence to serve others while achieving personal and professional success. As part of the institutional mission, the university has been committed to providing educational opportunities for all people, especially those affected by economic, physical, or social advantages. The
university consists of four local campuses located in Queens, Staten Island, Manhattan, Long Island, and three international campuses in Rome, Italy, and Paris, France, and Seville, Spain. This study took place on the Queens campus, which is primarily a commuter campus although there are residential halls located both on and off campus that house approximately 3,400 students. The university is organized into six colleges providing degree programs in liberal arts and sciences, business, professional fields, education, pharmacy and health professions, and law.

At the time of the study, the student population of 21,067 included 15,766 undergraduates, 5,301 graduate students, and 2,763 freshmen with students from 46 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands and 110 countries. Approximately 45% of the student population came from New York City, with an additional 27% from Nassau and Suffolk Counties, New York. The student population consisted of 56% female, 44% male, and 45% minorities (Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, American Indian/Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or two more races). Black males and females represented 13.3% of the student population, and Black males specifically was at 5.4% (St. John’s University Fact Book, 2011). The demographic profile of the full time faculty and administrators depicted a similar trend to that of the students. At the time of the study, Black/African-Americans made up 5% of the full-time faculty and 13% of full time administrators.

In 2011, the annual tuition expenses were approximately $33,125 depending on the program of study. The university was known for providing students with significant financial aid packages; 94% of the undergraduate population received financial aid,
which consisted of $463 million in financial aid distributed and $198 million in university monies. As part of the institutional mission, the university was committed to providing educational opportunities for all people, especially those affected by economic, physical, or social disadvantages. The Board of Trustees established a threshold of accepting 40% of Pell eligible students (total household income equaled $20,000 to $50,000) for the incoming class. As of fall 2011, the university exceeded the goal with 48%. (St. John’s University Fact Book, 2011).

The university provided multiple ways for students to get involved on campus. With over 100 academic, cultural, religious, political, social justice, honor societies, and special interest student organizations there were abundant opportunities for students to be involved with campus life. During the fall 2012 semester, there were a total of 1,218 events where 95% of the first-year student population participated compared to 64% of the fourth-year students. This drop in participation is expected because as the students matriculate from year-to-year, their level of involvement decreases as they focus on internship opportunities and job exploration. An examination of the level of involvement between the commuter population and the resident population revealed that the commuters (65%) were less involved than the resident (97%) population. This gap in levels of involvement was also apparent when comparing students from the five boroughs of New York City and Long Island (67%) to those from outside the five boroughs (85%). The university administration identified a shift in student demographics with a decline in the traditional-aged (18-24) student population and an increase in the number of Hispanic students. Though the university was ranked third in 2011 by US News and World Report for being one of the most diverse in the nation, the university administrators have
recognized the need to study and address an ongoing difference in retention and
graduation rates for all ethnic groups and especially the lower rates for Black students
and males in particular. Over the period of 2001-2011, the proportion of Whites in the
entering class declined from 42% to 32% as compared to the upward trend of Black
students (16% to 22%). However, while the university enjoyed a strong increase in the
enrollment rates, retention rates of Black and Hispanic (76%) students remained lower
than their White (83%) and Asian (83%) counterparts (St. John’s University Fact Book,
2011). The overall six-year graduation rates for the 2001 - 2005 cohorts averaged 59%,
with nonresidents (65%), Whites (64%), and Asians (62%), above the average, and
Hispanics (54%) and African-Americans (52%) below the average. Only 50% of Black
males graduated within 6 years (St. John’s University Fact Book, 2011).

Traditionally, Student Affairs and Academic Affairs have operated as separate
tentities of the university—a situation known as the silo concept. The university
recognized the issue with retention needed to be shared by all entities in order to impact
change. In 2009, The D’Angelo Center was opened as a location where Student Affairs
and Academic Affairs were linked. The building, located in the heart of the campus,
provided classroom space, lounge space, recreational space, and a food court where
students, faculty, and administrators could engage. This intentional space provided a
venue to increase out-of-class interactions with students, faculty, and administrators. In
August 2011, there was a repositioning of the university’s strategic plan which
established engagement with students as an integral part of the criteria for tenure and
promotion (St. John’s University Repositioning of the Strategic Plan, 2011). These were
the most visible steps the university took in order to dismantle the separation between the
two most intrinsic areas responsible for student learning and development.

Research Participants

In order to capture the true essence of the experiences of successful Black males at St. John’s University, criterion sampling was applied. This form of sampling works best in qualitative research when the individuals can represent others who have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Merriam (1998) stated that in order for a researcher to use a criterion-based selection process, one must create a list of criteria for selection. Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement perspective was used as a foundation for selecting the successful Black males to participate in this study in order to provide greater insight to university faculty and administrators about what made them successful. The criteria for the sample were Black males classified as juniors or seniors with a 3.0 grade point average and above, who were on track to graduate on time. This population represented a total of 149 students (86 juniors and 63 seniors) out of a total of 355 students (236 juniors and 119 seniors). From this group a total of 16 participants were selected, which represented approximately 10% of the pool.

There were 13 participants who consisted of nine seniors and four juniors majoring in a variety of majors represented by two colleges at the university (the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the College of Professional Studies) who participated in the individual interviews. The same criteria were used in selecting participants for a focus group, which consisted of three juniors representing the College of Professional Studies and majoring in Sports Management, Hospitality Management, and Communications. In total 16 Black college men provided their lived experiences on what made them successful at St.
John’s University. All of the participants provided a clear understanding of what assisted them to become both academically and socially successful and stay on track to graduate on time, unlike many of their peers.

An invitation (Appendix B) to participate in the study was sent out to all students in this pool. The invitation explained the importance of understanding the students’ experiences at St. John’s University because they represented a small percentage of successful Black males with high grade point averages who were prepared to graduate on time. The invitation also explained that the students’ insight into the phenomenon was crucial because they could provide pertinent information that can further assist other Black males to succeed at the university. The invitation also explained how important their participation in this study was to university administration and faculty who were interested in improving the quality of educational services for all students and in particular Black males. The students were asked to participate in a face-to-face interview at a location most comfortable for them. They were also informed the interview would be recorded so the information captured reflected what was discussed, but the only people who would have access to the recordings would be the researcher and the transcriptionist. To ensure anonymity, the participants were told their names would not be used in the study. This way, they students could be as candid as possible and be comfortable to share their experiences. All measures to safeguard the identity of the participants were used throughout the study. Specifically, the participant’s initials were only used to organize the data and the direct quotes of the participants were never linked to their name.

In alignment with the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board’s requirements for the study of human subjects, the study included careful attention to
obtaining participant consent. A consent form (Appendix C) accompanied the invitation to participate in the study. The consent form explained rights of participants in the study, that participation in the study would in no way affect academic standing at the university, and they were free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without any repercussions. The consent form also provided the contact information for the Institutional Review Board at St. John Fisher College and the researcher’s Committee Chair. All consent forms were reviewed and collected prior to the interview to answer any last minute questions.

Because the study was asking for successful students to share their stories in order to assist others, all the participants did not object to revealing their names in the study. They were excited to be asked to provide information about what made them successful so they could help others who were not. Despite the participants’ enthusiasm and openness, to remain consistent with guidelines for human protection, anonymity was preserved.

**Instruments Used in Data Collection**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data (Creswell, 2007). To gain insight into the in and out-of-classroom experiences realized by Black male students attending St. John’s University, a series of open-ended questions (Appendix D) were used to guide the 13 individual interviews and the one focus group. Open-ended questions were the most revealing in terms of individual meaning both experienced and interpreted by the participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Open-ended questions provided an opportunity for participants to respond in their own words and gave meaningful and explanatory data based on the question
Open-ended questions also served as a guide to stay focused on the subject and possibly lead to new knowledge (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Harper’ (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework provided insight for the study and the development of the open-ended questions. The framework focused specifically on Black male achievers, and Harper inverted questions normally asked about the causes of the academic achievement gap of Black males and, instead, focused on what has led to their success in college. The framework focused on three pipeline points that affected the overall college experience, retention, and degree attainment of a Black male. Harper (2012) focused on the pre-college socialization and readiness (pre-college support programs, parental involvement and support, etc.), the college achievement (classroom experiences, out-of-class experiences, and enriching educational experiences) and the post-college success. Within each pipeline, a group of research questions were provided for the purposes of future research to better understand Black male student success in college. Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research of Black males from an anti-deficit achievement perspective provided a balanced understanding of the lives of Black men in colleges and universities who have navigated successfully.

According to Creswell (2009) qualitative researchers use a theoretical lens or perspective in order to guide the development of the questions, how the data is collected, and to provide an opportunity for change. The open-ended questions developed for this research drew inspiration from Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework and the three theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter 1. Harper’s (2003, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2012) research provided the platform for studying successful Black males. His studies provided information on how successful Black males navigated through college,
the benefits of being involved, how peers and family members motivated the students, and how racial identity played a role in engagement. Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory posited culture and learning were inextricably intertwined and emphasized the role of community in cognitive development. The goal of these questions was to have the participants reveal the best type of teaching styles and environments, which significantly impacted their learning. Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory built on the student’s self-perceptions of their ability to perform a task, in order to produce positive outcomes. Bandura’s theory assisted in identifying the non-cognitive factors that inspired the participants to succeed. The intent of these questions was to uncover those motivators, which produced positive outcomes for the participants in the study. Astin’s (1984) involvement theory focused on how involvement in educationally purposeful activities promoted student development and persistence. The objective of these questions was to inquire about the level of involvement in educationally purposeful programs to determine whether there was a link between involvement and academic success. Questions also were developed to help identify the barriers that impeded persistence and graduation for Black males and seek to understand their insight into how the university can assist with the issue of Black male engagement, retention, and graduation.

To ensure the appropriateness of the research instrument, a process of validation was used. A panel of experts consisting of five students (three seniors and two juniors) representing a variety of majors represented by four of the five colleges at the university: The College of Professional Studies, St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, The Tobin College of Business, and the School of Education was convened. All of the participants met the same criteria to qualify as a participant in the study. The panel of
experts participated in a meeting where they had the opportunity to answer the interview questions. A conversation ensued and the panel provided examples of how they would respond, and based on their responses and feedback, adjustments were made to the interview protocol.

Qualitative researchers use numerous data sources such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents in order to validate their findings (Creswell, 2009). All of the data sources are then reviewed and data is organized into themes that intersect all of the sources. Through this process, the researcher focuses on the meaning of the participant’s experiences through their lens rather than that of the researcher (Creswell, 2009). For this study, three methods were used to gather data on the lived experiences of successful Black males at St. John’s University: in-depth interviewing, a focus group, and an examination of archival data from the university’s information gathering system.

**In-depth interviewing.** Qualitative researchers use interviewing in order to elicit views, opinions, and experiences with the phenomenon being examined (Creswell, 2009). Interviewing provides meaning around the topic and empowers the researcher to register and interpret what is said and how it is said (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It is important for the researcher to be open to new information and not to arrive with preconceived notions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The open-ended questions provided the participants the opportunity to share their lived experiences regarding how they successfully enrolled, retained, and persisted toward graduation. The study participants shared common experiences, as well new insight and opinions about the topics discussed and allowed the researcher to explore the reasons that made them successful.
Focus group. The second from of data collection was through a focus group consisting of three Black males who met the same requirements of those who participated in the in-depth interviews. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) focus groups are not used to reach a consensus but rather to provide an opportunity for the expression of different views points. It is advantageous to use focus groups because this method of data collection provides an evolution of perceptions in a social context (Patten, 2009). During a focus group, the facilitator describes the topic to be discussed and creates an environment where the participants feel free to express their feelings or experiences even if it differs from others in the group (Patten, 2009). To guide the focus of the discussion, the same interview questions were used from the in-depth interviews in order to examine whether the participants shared similar experiences with the phenomenon being studied. The group provided a discussion about their experiences that was more spontaneous and expressive than the individual interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). While the group shared common experiences, there were instances where they differed in opinions and experiences.

Archival data. According to Stringer (2007) a great deal of significant information can be obtained through the review of pertinent documents and records. As such, archival data such as grade point averages, place of residence, and level of involvement were retrieved through the university’s information system (Banner) and reviewed. This data was important because it provided the overall academic record used to identify potential participants, informed whether the participants came from a diverse community or high school, and identified the participants’ level of involvement on campus. The archival information was reviewed for any commonalities and differences
among the participants of the study to assist in drawing parallels between the demographics and the respondents.

The HT Recorder for iPad was used to capture verbatim the individual interviews and the focus group. The quality of the recordings was superb and the program allowed for easy sharing of data with the transcriptionist. Notes were also taken during all of the interviews to capture the non-verbal reactions to the questions and record what took place during the interview that was not captured in the verbatim recordings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). These notes provided supplemental data when analyzing the transcripts. Only the researcher and a professional transcriber analyzed the recordings and the transcripts. The transcriber only received the initials of the participants to provide anonymity. Once the information was analyzed and transcribed by the outside transcriptionist, all records and transcriptions remained with the researcher and were saved on an external hard drive and locked in a filing cabinet in the home of the researcher.

**Data Analysis**

Creswell (2007) suggested that in qualitative research designs, the researcher prepares and organizes the data for analysis, reduces the data into themes through coding, and then represents the data through figures, tables, and a discussion. However, before the coding process occurs, the researcher will have to approach the data inductively, whereas the data will speak for itself with no preconceived hypothesis to test (Seidman, 2006). The process of data analysis consisted of seven steps: (a) organizing the data, (b) familiarization of the data, (c) generating categories and themes, (d) coding the data, (e) interpreting the data, (f) searching for alternative understandings, and (g) writing the
Given the literature and research on successful Black males in college reviewed by the researcher, a priori codes were used as a preliminary guide. During the first round of coding all transcripts from the in-depth interviews and the focus group were read multiple times to build familiarity with the information in order to start the process of open coding. During open coding the raw data was focused and labeled through a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements representing the experiences of the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The first round of coding was completed in order to obtain descriptive analysis of the lived experiences. This process aided in breaking down the text into simpler ideas and concepts.

During the second round of coding, the words or group of words were further examined to produce themes and sub-themes. This process yielded 15 major themes and 94 sub-themes. A third round of coding further refined the themes and yielded 7 major themes and 23 sub-themes (Table 3.1). This process was conducted for the data collected from the focus group and the individual interviews. The themes and sub-themes delineated from the qualitative data best described the lived experiences of all participants for each phenomenon being studied.

**Triangulation.** According to Stringer (2007), it is important in action research to take all measures to ensure credibility of the research process and not rely only on one source of data. In order to increase the level of credibility of a study, triangulation should be used where multiple sources data are used in order to clarify meaning (Stringer, 2007). For purposes of triangulation, there were three data sources used to capture and make meaning of the themes and sub-themes delineated from the data collected. The first source consisted of 13 Black males who had a 3.0 grade point average or higher and were
on track to graduate participated in one-on-one in-depth interviews. The second data source came from a focus group consisting of three Black males who also met the same criteria to participate in the study. The data from the individual interviews of the 13 participants were reviewed against the data from the focus groups to monitor for consistency of information. The third data source consisted of information extracted from the university’s information system (Banner). The data consisted of the participant’s grade point averages, place of residence, and their level of involvement. These three areas were examined for any commonalities and differences among the participants of the study to assist in drawing parallels between the demographics and the respondents.
Table 3.1

*Themes from Individual Interviews and Focus Group Participant’s*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1</td>
<td>Characteristics of the university</td>
<td>Location (NYC) metro area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diverse campus population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Generous financial-aid package</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #2</td>
<td>Caring and engaging faculty</td>
<td>Academic rigor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Approachability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Passion for subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #3</td>
<td>Innovative teaching methods</td>
<td>Practical (real-world) learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interactive and engaging classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #4</td>
<td>Motivations for success</td>
<td>Family support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Downfall of peers/family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #5</td>
<td>Personal development and community support</td>
<td>Be with like-minded peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Give back to the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunities afforded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Development of transferrable skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #6</td>
<td>Reasons for departure</td>
<td>Financial concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not academically prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of self-discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #7</td>
<td>Support services needed for success</td>
<td>Mentoring programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Better communication of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement of local high schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology of the study, as well as a description of the research context, research participants, instruments to be used in data collection, and data analysis for a phenomenological study. The context in which this study took place was at St. John’s University.

An invitation letter was sent to the pool of qualified students requesting their participation in the study. The letter and accompanying consent form provided an outline of the study, the students’ role in the study, and included information in the areas of confidentiality and freedom to not answer a question or leave the study with no repercussions. The research participants were selected through criterion sampling and data collection involved face-to-face interviews with 13 successful Black males either in their junior or senior year and are on track to graduate on time. For triangulation purposes a focus group of three African-American males who met the criteria for the study were asked the same questions as the individual interviewees. Archival data from the university’s information system (Banner) was also examined to help identify participants for the study, the participants’ place of residence, and financial-aid packages. This data was important as it created an opportunity to identify any differences or commonalities between the participants.

Open-ended questions were developed based on the research literature and theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 1 in order to capture the lived experiences of the participants. The face-to-face interviews and the responses provided during the focus group were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. An overall analysis of the
experiences through themes and text supported by direct quotes from the interviews is provided in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4: Results

Research Questions

This chapter outlines the findings of a qualitative research study involving a group of Black men who, in spite of the odds, have successfully enrolled, retained, and were on track to graduate from a four-year predominately-White urban university in the Northeast region of the United States. The chapter includes responses to the essential research questions that guided the study, descriptive and cross analyses on the data collected, and a summary of results. This study was conducted in response to the low percentage of persistence and graduation rates of Black males in college. Findings were inspired by and built on Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework.

Through 13 in-depth interviews and one focus group consisting of three Black males, this study gathered perceptions of 16 Black males who maintained a 3.0 grade point average or higher and either graduated or are on schedule to graduate from the university. Through their interviews, the students shared their insight into what they attributed to their success. The findings offered insight on the learning environments and type of support needed for academic success through their own experiences and voices. This chapter is an overview of the findings for the research questions developed for this study. Each research questions was developed with the theoretical framework in mind in order to connect theory to practice and provide an analysis between the theory and the findings of the study. In addition, accompanying each research question is a brief
statement on the theory is provided, which helped in the development of the questions and the findings from the data gathered from the individual interviews and focus group.

**What type of in-class teaching methods and environments had a significant impact on the learning of Black college males?** According to the participants, interactive and engaging classroom environments provided more opportunities to collaborate with their fellow peers and the faculty member. The participants realized that an interactive classroom environment was more beneficial to their learning because they were able to learn from others in the classroom. This type of learning environment increased their level of satisfaction and achievement. Participants all agreed that faculty members who used a variety of teaching techniques best engaged them in the learning process. The participants also recognized they learned best in a classroom where the faculty member created opportunities to bring in real world learning as a part of the educational process. Many of the participants agreed they learned best when they applied what they learned inside the classroom to practical experiences outside the classroom.

Faculty members, who were able to provide experiential learning opportunities tied to the subject matter, made the learning more practical and tangible. The participants were able to link theory to practice and therefore grasped a better understanding of the subject matter. They expressed they learned more when they were able to take what they were learning inside the classroom and apply it to tangible examples outside of the classroom. Through this teaching method, they were able to connect the two in order to better comprehend the lesson.

**What are the specific non-cognitive factors that had a significant impact on Black college males?** The participants agreed their families played a major role in
supporting and encouraging them to be academically successful. From the beginning, their family instilled the importance of a college education in order to be successful in life. For many of the participants, there was no other option besides enrolling and graduating from college because of their families. Even though some of the family members did not attend college, they still motivated the participants to attain a degree so they would not have to struggle in life. Some of the participants used the struggle of their family members as a source of motivation to complete the degree. The participants realized they had more access than their families, and they wanted to make sure that they capitalized on these opportunities. At the core, the participants wanted to make their family members proud of their accomplishments and give them the gift of successfully attaining a college degree. They also used the downfall of many of their family members and peers as a source of motivation. Many of them spoke about their family members and peers who were either killed or incarcerated because of poor choices. These incidents motivated them to want more for themselves, and they used those negative situations as learning opportunities.

Self-discipline was another major theme that emerged. Many of the participants believed it was their self-discipline that played a major role in academic achievement. The participants realized they possessed self-discipline, which was one of the main factors that separated them from peers who were not as successful. The participants knew how to manage their time productively and focus on the end goal of graduating with a four-year degree. They did not allow anything or anyone get in the way of their goal.

What types of educationally purposeful activities/clubs enhance the in-class learning for Black college males? All participants mentioned being involved in
organizations both on and off campus, which fostered camaraderie among like-minded peers who were academically driven and community conscious. These organizations provided a venue for the participants to interact with peers who were actively engaged in both personal and community development. On campus the participants yearned to assist other students with their transition to college, and off campus they wanted to provide access and knowledge about college to high school students who did not see college as an option. They believed that being surrounded by other students focused on academics helped them remain focused. Their involvement also helped enhance their basic proficiencies and skills necessary for academic achievement. The participants expressed how their involvement helped them to refine time management and communication skills, which they realized was beneficial in and out-of-the classroom.

**What are some of the barriers that impede accomplishing persistence and graduation and to what degree can they be addressed through policy and practices invoked by university administrators?** When the participants were asked to share their understanding of why their Black male peers left the university before they graduated, they stated financial reasons, lack of academic preparation, and lack of self-discipline and support. Many of their peers left the university because it was too expensive. Once their peers were accepted into the university, they realized they could not keep up with the cost of tuition for four years. According to the participants, there was a lack of consistency with the financial aid package and a lack of knowledge of the financial aid process.

The participants shared their concerns that high schools have not been properly preparing students for the rigors of the college environment. The participants explained how at times their high school was more concerned with meeting certain standards and
did not take the extra step to properly prepare and engage students. The participants also understood the value of self-discipline and how it played a major role in their success. They realized their peers who left the university too early lacked self-discipline, which ultimately was one of their downfalls.

When the participants were asked to share what they believed the university could do to increase the graduation rates, they stated the need for mentoring programs to assist with the transition and better communication of financial and other services. The participants agreed that a mentoring program for incoming Black males would be beneficial to their success. Participants believed that a mentoring program during the first year would assist the students in getting acclimated to the university and provide them with the knowledge on how to successfully navigate the college environment.

The participants also believed if the university did a better job at educating Black males on the financial aid process and other scholarship opportunities, then students would be equipped with the knowledge on how to successfully finance their college education. They believed if Black males did not have to worry as much about the financial implications of their college degree, it would alter the retention rates at the university. The participants explained that the university needed to intentionally reach out to the Black students and inform them, not only about how they can finance their college education, but also of all the other support services beneficial to academic success. Through these outreach initiatives, Blacks males would have access to services and opportunities that would greatly impact their overall academic experience.
Data Analysis and Findings

The 13 participants of the individual interviews and the three from the focus group shared their lived experiences with the phenomenon being studied. This resulted in the development of seven themes, which were: (a) characteristics of the university, (b) caring and engaging faculty, (c) innovative teaching methods, (d) motivations for success, (e) personal development and community support, (f) reasons for departure, and (g) support services needed for success. Before the analysis of the findings is presented, it is important to briefly discuss and analyze the participants in the study in order to gain more knowledge and background on their overall experiences that helped them to be on track to graduate in spite of the odds. In the descriptive analysis that follows, the demographics of the participants and a biographical sketch are set forth to provide context to the experiences of the participants. This will be followed by a cross analysis of the data to show what emerged after triangulation.

Descriptive analysis of individual interview participants. To gain a better understanding of the participants, it is important to provide general background information about those who participated in the individual interviews separate from those who participated in the focus group. This description is followed by a brief biographical sketch, which provides a glimpse into family structure, academic and social experiences in high school, impetus to attend college, and overall experiences at St. John’s University.

The participants in the individual interviews represented a diverse group (Table 4.1). All were between the ages of 20-28 with a mean age of 22 years-old. Of the 13 interview participants, 12 identified as African-American and one identified as
Caribbean-American. A total of 5 African-Americans represented the junior class and 7 the senior class. The one who identified as Caribbean-American represented the senior class. There were a total of 8 participants who came from the New York metropolitan area (Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, Bronx, and Staten Island) and Long Island, while 5 came from outside of New York State. A total of 5 of the participants who identified as African-American and the one student who identified as Caribbean-American had a cumulative grade point average between a 3.0 - 3.5. The other 7 participants who identified as African-American achieved a cumulative grade point average in the range of a 3.51 – 4.0.

Table 4.1

Description of Individual Interview Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>College Ranking (Junior)</th>
<th>College Ranking (Senior)</th>
<th>New York Metropolitan Area and Long Island</th>
<th>Outside New York State</th>
<th>Grade Point Average (3.0-3.5)</th>
<th>Grade Point Average (3.51-4.0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean-American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the individual interviews, the participants disclosed their parental household environment and whether they were first generation college students. This information provided context for their overall academic experience (Table 4.2). Of the 13 interview participants, 8 stated they came from a two-parent household and 4 from a single-parent household. The one participant who identified as Caribbean-American said he came from a two-parent household. Of the 13 participants, 4 of the African-American
students stated they were first generation college students, while 8 were not. The one Caribbean-American participant explained he was a first generation college student.

Table 4.2

*Individual Interviewees’ Parental Household Environment and First Generation Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Two Parent Household</th>
<th>Single Parent Household</th>
<th>First Generation College Student</th>
<th>Not a First Generation College Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean-American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was important to determine whether the participants were actively involved on or off campus in order to determine how their involvement further enhanced their academic experiences. Participants of the individual interviews shared their level of involvement (Table 4.3). There were a total of 11 students who were involved both on and off campus, while only two were involved only off campus. The biographical sketches below provide more information on the types of programs and activities the participants were involved in.

Table 4.3

*Description of Involvement for Individual Interviewees*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Involved on campus only</th>
<th>Involved off campus only</th>
<th>Involved both on and off campus</th>
<th>Not involved at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean-American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Biographical sketches of individual interview participants. The students who participated in the individual interviews represented a diverse group in regards to both their family, academic, and social experiences both in high school and college. Their experiences were different but they all arrived at the same goal of graduating from a four-year institution.

Participant 1. Participant 1 was a 21-year-old African-American senior majoring in Government and Politics. He came from a two-parent family from an affluent area in Baltimore, Maryland. His parents and family members were highly educated and education was important to him. He attended a competitive high school where he was actively involved both in extra-curricular activities and sports teams. He was the only person of color in his advanced placement courses. He believed his high school experience was sufficient to prepare him for the rigors of college. While in college he had the opportunity to publish a book of poetry, which was one of his greatest accomplishments. He was actively involved in college through various student organizations such as Student Government, Inc., departmental programs such as Orientation Leader and Student Ambassador, and was a member of the prestigious President’s Society. The President’s Society was the highest honor bestowed to a select few students who served as the student cabinet to the president of the university.

Participant 2. Participant 2 was a 22-year-old African-American senior majoring in communications. He came from a single parent home on Long Island, New York, where his mother was the primary caretaker. Since she was the primary caretaker, she was often at work, which meant he was not supervised. He explained that he had a poor high school experience academically and participated in sports teams. He said he had no
self-discipline in high school, which caused him to get involved in a gang. He changed high schools a total of three times between the ninth and twelfth grade. It was after his third transfer to a Catholic high school that he began to focus academically. His church and the members within became his major source of motivation. He stated that after graduation from high school, he was not motivated to go to college; however his mother fortunately forced him to go to college. While in college he had difficulty acclimating, and he focused his attention on the social scene. However, once he became a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., he met other Black men who were focused on academics, which changed his mindset. Eventually, he became a student leader and founded a student organization on campus based on his passion for poetry.

Participant 3. Participant 3 was a 21-year-old African-American senior majoring in government and politics. He grew-up in a two parent home from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where he attended a predominately White all boys’ high school. His high school experience was academically rigorous, which caused him to have to attend summer school twice. He was actively involved in high school through various student clubs. For him, attending college was a must in order to get out of his bad neighborhood. Unfortunately his stepbrothers did not attend college, and one ended up in prison. While at St. John’s University, the participant had a thriving academic and social experience and was an Orientation Leader.

Participant 4. Participant 4 was a 28-year-old African-American senior majoring in African-American Literature who came from a single parent home in Bronx, New York. He described his high school experience as “okay” because he believed he lacked skills in writing, grammar, and mathematics. He also said his teachers lacked the skills to
teach. He decided to go to college because it was something ingrained from very young by his family, and he did not want to become a statistic. He graduated high school and attended Bronx Community College, where he spent four years but never completed his Bachelor’s degree. He finally transferred to St. John’s University and had a great academic experience. He was not involved on campus but rather his involvement was mostly off–campus where he would help high school kids with poetry and personal development.

Participant 5. Participant 5 was a 21-year-old Caribbean-American senior majoring in computer security systems. He grew up in a two-parent household on the island of Jamaica, West Indies. He lived there for 10 years and then moved to Long Island, New York. His parents instilled the value of an education from very young. He did well academically in high school and also participated in a variety of sports teams. He was actively involved while in college and became a resident assistant and a member of the Student Ambassadors, an organization in which the student members provided tours and peer mentoring to incoming students. He also had the opportunity to participate in an internship in his field of study.

Participant 6. Participant 6 was a 21-year-old African-American senior majoring in government and politics. He came from a two-parent home in Miami, Florida. He described his high school experience as “amazing” because he did well academically and was highly involved in a variety of leadership positions while in high school. He was president of the student council and a member of the Young Government Leaders Program. He said he always knew he wanted to major in politics because he was passionate about the topic. While at St. John’s he was involved in a variety of
organizations and became the president of Student Government, Inc. His academic record and involvement provided him with many internship and job opportunities.

*Participant 7.* Participant 7 was a 21-year-old African-American senior majoring in legal studies. He came from a single-parent home in Virginia. He originally lived in Bronx, New York but was moved to Virginia to get away from bad influences in his neighborhood. He said he had a great high school experience academically and socially. He played basketball so well that he received a college scholarship, which he lost due to an injury. His mother instilled the value of a college education and wanted him to be an educated athlete while in high school. While in Virginia, he lost many friends from murder and incarceration, which he used as a source of motivation to want more out of life. He was involved both on and off campus while in college and was well admired by his peers and administrators. He was a member of the Student Ambassador program, which provided tours and peer support to incoming students. He was also an active member of Haraya, The Pan-African Student Coalition, which was the university’s Black student union.

*Participant 8.* Participant 8 was a 20-year-old African-American junior majoring in criminal justice. He came from a single-parent home from Germany where his parent was posted because of the military. He attended high school both in Germany and Italy. He called his high school experience a good one because he was involved socially and he had a strong academic record. He was actively involved in student council and was a member of the Junior Reserved Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC). His family pushed the idea of college but did not know how he was going to pay for it. He joined ROTC at St. John’s University and became active on campus through a variety of student
organizations including being an inaugural member of the Black and Latino peer mentoring program, as well as a resident assistant. He was also an active member of Haraya, the Pan-African Student Coalition, which was the university’s Black student union.

Participant 9. Participant 9 was a 21-year-old African-American senior majoring in criminal justice. He came from a single-parent home from Long Island, New York. He had a poor academic high school experience but he was involved in sports. He missed a total of 50 to 60 days of school, which caused him to fall behind. He recognized he lacked interest while in high school, which caused him to get involved in with the wrong group of friends. He did well in advanced placement English because that was the only course that challenged him. He believed his neighborhood did not provide a positive outlet for Black males. He originally wanted to attend college for sports but realized he needed to change his life style. While in college he had the opportunity to connect with successful Black males, which positively influenced him. He was active on campus in a variety of organizations such as Student Government, Inc. and was a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

Participant 10. Participant 10 was a 21-year-old African-American senior majoring in public relations. He came from a single-parent home in Queens, New York. He had a good high school experience especially after he got involved. He realized once he got involved in high school, his grades began to improve. Attending college was engrained as a must after high school. Because he had an older brother who attended St. John’s University, this idea was further encouraged and supported. He was actively
engaged on campus and became an orientation leader and later a student coordinator for the program.

Participant 11. Participant 11 was a 27-year-old African-American senior majoring in television and film. He came from a single-parent home in Bayonne, New Jersey. He was an average student while in high school where he was involved in a program for future police officers when he got distracted by friends and his neighborhood. He attended community college where he slacked off, and then he enlisted in the military. Following his time in the military, he attended a school for acting and then transferred to St. John’s University. He was not actively involved on campus, but off campus he mentored young Black males.

Participant 12. Participant 12 was a 22-year-old African-American junior majoring in advertising. He came from a single-parent household in Galloway, New Jersey. He had a poor high school experience academically, which caused him to attend two different high schools. He was involved in negative situations, which distracted him from school. He decided he wanted to change his lifestyle, so he decided to go to college. He came to the university as a transfer student and quickly acclimated to the environment. He became a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc and an inaugural mentor for the Black and Latino mentoring program. His good academic standing and involvement both on and off campus helped him get an internship with an advertising firm.

Participant 13. Participant 13 was a 22-year-old African-American senior majoring in criminal justice. He came from a two-parent home in Mount Vernon, New York. Although he had a poor high school experience academically, he was socially
active and focused mostly on sports. To him school was secondary. He attended two high schools and was involved with peers who were not positively motivated. If his older brother had not attended college and graduated, he said he never would have thought about attending. His brother was a role model and provided him with direction and discipline. He attended Westchester Community College and then transferred to St. John’s University. While at St. John’s he began to become involved on campus and that is what helped him focus on academics. He then became the vice president of the Student Programming Board.

**Descriptive analysis of focus group participants.** Students who met the criteria of a 3.0 grade point average and were either in their junior or senior year in college were selected to participate in a focus group for the purposes of triangulation. They were all 20-years-old. The students who participated in the focus group provided similar demographics to that of the participants of the individual interviews (Table 4.4). All three of the participants identified as African-American and represented the junior class. Only one came from outside New York State. All three students had a cumulative grade point average in the range of a 3.51 – 4.0.

Table 4.4

*Description of Focus Group Study Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>College Ranking (Junior)</th>
<th>College Ranking (Senior)</th>
<th>New York Metropolitan Area and Long Island</th>
<th>Outside New York State</th>
<th>Grade Point Average (3.0-3.5)</th>
<th>Grade Point Average (3.51-4.0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants of the focus group disclosed their parental household status and whether they were either first generation college students (Table 4.5). All three participants came from two-parent homes and were considered first generation college students.

Table 4.5

*Focus Groups’ Parental Household Environment and First Generation Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Two Parent Household</th>
<th>Single Parent Household</th>
<th>First Generation College Student</th>
<th>Not a First Generation College Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same question regarding involvement was asked of the focus group participants. They shared that they were all actively involved both on and off campus (Table 4.6). All of them had internship experiences in their field of study and used their on campus involvement as a means to attain their internships.

Table 4.6

*Description of Involvement for Focus Group Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Involved on campus only</th>
<th>Involved off campus only</th>
<th>Involved both on and off campus</th>
<th>Not involved at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Biographical sketches of focus group participants.** The students who participated in the focus group came from similar family settings, high school
experiences, and social experiences both in high school and college. They were all in their third year of college and ready to graduate on time from a four-year institution.

Participant 14. Participant 14 was a 20-year-old African-American junior majoring in sports management. He came from a two-parent home from Suffolk, Long Island. He believed high school was very easy and that it did not challenge him. He was active in the school newspaper and a few sports teams. He believed his sense of motivation to go to college derived from him and not his family. While in college he was active in a variety of student organizations such as the Sports Management Society and a member of the Orientation Leader staff. He had the opportunity to participate in an internship at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn, New York.

Participant 15. Participant 15 was a 20-year-old African-American junior majoring in hospitality management. He came from a two-parent home in Queens, New York. He too believed high school was not as challenging as he expected and that it did not properly prepare him for college. He was actively involved in a few student clubs, which he believed assisted him academically. He also believed he was his own motivation to go to college and succeed. He became active on campus and joined the Orientation Leader team and then became a student coordinator the following year. During that same time he also became the student coordinator for the first-year core course “Discover New York”. Through his involvement he was able to get a few internships in his field of hospitality management.

Participant 16. Participant 16 was a 20-year-old African-American junior majoring in communications. He came from a two-parent household in North Carolina. He explained he had a varied experience in regards to the rigor of high school. He
believed he too could have been challenged a little more to better prepare him for college. While in high school he played sports year round, wrote for the school newspaper, and joined the junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corp (ROTC). While at St. John’s University he became active on campus and joined the Orientation Leader team. He also became one of the first students to become a career peer as a part of the university’s career services initiative. He was also able to get a few internships in his field.

**Cross analysis of the individual interviews and the focus group.** The data captured from the participants of the individual interviews and the focus group provided insight on their overall experiences. The first analysis intended to determine whether there was a correlation between their overall academic experience in high school and their involvement in sports, clubs, and student organizations in high school.

Table 4.7

*Description of Participants’ Overall Academic Experience in High School and Engagement in High School Sports, Clubs, and Organizations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Experience in High School</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>I Was Socially Engaged in High School</th>
<th>I Was Not Socially Engaged in High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data revealed that out of the 16 participants, nine had a good academic experience in high school as opposed to seven who had a bad academic experience. All 9 participants who did well academically were also socially engaged in multiple sports, activities, and student organizations. Of the students who were not as academically focused in high school, four were socially engaged and three were not. The four students who had a bad
academic experience, but were socially engaged, were all involved in sports related activities.

A second analysis aimed to discover whether the parental unit significantly impacted the achievement level of the participant in high school and their overall view of college being the next step after graduation (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8

*Description of Parental Unit, Overall Experience in High School, and College as the Next Step*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Unit</th>
<th>Good High School Experience</th>
<th>Bad High School Experience</th>
<th>College Is the Next Step</th>
<th>College Is Not the Next Step</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent Home</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Parent Home</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall the parental units of the participants were almost evenly distributed when comparing whether the participants had a good high school experience or not. Of the 16 participants, five came from single-parent home and had a good high school experience, while the remaining six came from a two-parent home. Of those participants who had a bad high school experience, three came from a single-parent home and two from a two-parent home.

The distribution between those participants who saw college as the next step after high school was close. A total of six participants from single-parent homes knew that college was the next step, whereas eight from two-parent home knew the same thing. Only two of the 16 participants did not see college as the next step after high school. Both of these participants came from a single-parent home.
The age range of the participants was from 20 to 28 with a mean age of 22.

Consistent with the data collected by university administrators, as the students matriculated from freshman year to senior year, their level of involvement decreased. However, all of the study participants were involved in some activities whether it was on campus, off campus, or both. When the data from both groups were analyzed (Table 4.9) it was found that only two participants between the ages of 22 and 28 were involved off campus only. The remaining 14 were involved both on and off campus.

Table 4.9

*Ages of Participants and Level of Involvement While in College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Involved On Campus Only</th>
<th>Involved Off Campus Only</th>
<th>Involved Both On and Off Campus</th>
<th>Not Involved At All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the conclusion of the individual interviews and the focus group, the data was integrated which resulted in seven themes and 21 sub-themes. This data represented the lived experiences of the participants of the study. Below is a detailed description of all themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data along with sample quotes that substantiate them. Triangulation is then discussed and affirmed by quotes and tables to further examine where the data converged. The following themes emerged and provided context to the overall experiences of the study participants. The seven themes were (a) characteristics of the university, (b) caring and engaging faculty, (c) innovative teaching methods, (d) motivations for success, (e) personal development and community support, (f) reasons for departure, and (g) support services needed for success. These themes are
discussed in more detail in the next sections. Appendix E contains details of the themes, sub-themes, and partial supportive quotes that provide an overview of the lived experiences of the participants.

**Theme 1: Characteristics of the university.** The participants had an opportunity to explain why they specifically selected St. John’s University and how it aided in their success. Location was one of the main reasons why a majority of the participants selected St. John’s. Since the majority came from the New York metropolitan area and Long Island, they wanted to stay close to home. Another reason was they believed the New York metropolitan area provided more access and networking opportunities for their careers. The participants also believed the diverse environment had a lot to do with their success. They expressed that they never felt like an outsider and it was due to the diversity of the university. The final reason why they selected the university was because of the financial aid package they received. Though they were accepted to other universities, St. John’s provided the best financial aid package.

**Location.** The majority of the participants came from the New York metropolitan area and they wanted to stay close to their family members. As for the participants who came from other states, they realized New York City would provide many opportunities for networking and access to a global market. They believed the metropolitan area was an extension of their classroom that would enhance their learning. One participant discussed the reason why he chose St. John’s was because he was from the area and he knew he would have access to the global market. He believed where a person chose to study was very important especially for networking opportunities.
Specifically I liked the fact it was in New York City, I’m from Brooklyn, it’s in Queens so you know it’s not really far. The fact that it’s in the global market of New York City…I think that’s very important. Where you study and the people you interact with in networking opportunities I think are important.

**Diverse campus population.** Upon arriving on campus, the participants were amazed to be a part of such a diverse student body. Some came from high schools that were not as diverse, so when they arrived on campus they were shocked to see how diverse it was. One participant spoke about how his high school was not diverse at all but when he arrived to St. John’s he realized how the diversity created a welcoming environment, which he admired.

My high school was not the most diverse… so coming to St. John’s it almost hits you in the face your first day. You come around and you see just so many different races and so many different backgrounds when I’m used to basically just seeing a thousand White people, basically, at my high school and then you come here and you see a ton of different races and everyone kind of kept to themselves, and then when you come to St. John’s and it’s almost like everyone is kind of together and everyone seemed more welcoming here.

Another participant realized being immersed in such a diverse environment would ultimately enhance his learning because he would not only learn from them but also be challenged to experience something different.

Attending a college that was extremely diverse, I knew there was a lot of different people from all over the country, all over the world coming here, so it would be a chance to engage with people from different backgrounds and get a real well-
rounded education. So coming to St. John’s I can have a chance to meet a lot of
different people and really open my mind to something totally different.

When the participants were asked to share their overall experiences as Black
males on campus, they shared positive experiences. The majority of the participants
explained since the campus was so diverse, race were rarely a factor. One respondent
spoke about the diverse environment and how it made him feel comfortable and not
worry about combating racism on campus.

It’s been positive, I wouldn’t say it’s been negative; I haven’t had any like racial
comments like that. As a Black male I don’t feel inferior to anybody or anything,
I felt like I fit right in. At St. John’s I just felt like another student.

Generous financial-aid package. Transitioning into a college environment can be
difficult especially when it comes to financing it. During their search for a college, many
factors were on the top of their list to help them decide where to go. Many were accepted
to multiple universities, but St. John’s provided the best financial aid package.
Ultimately the financial aid package was the final factor that altered their decision to
attend the university. Some candidly expressed it was solely the financial aid package
that encouraged them to select St. John’s, but when they had an opportunity to examine
all of the benefits of the institution, they knew it was the school for them. One
participant shared this sentiment when he was deciding about attending the university.
He stated, “Well to be honest it was mostly the aid but then like I compared it to other
schools and like I felt like St. John’s had something a little bit more to offer to me.”

Summary. The participants shared the reasons they selected St. John’s University
and believed these were the reasons why they were successful. They all wanted to be in
the New York metropolitan area because of its global market and the many opportunities available to them. Some of the participants came from the New York metropolitan area, and they wanted to stay close to home while others wanted to be immersed in an environment that offered access to the global market. All of the participants believed the location of the university played a major role in why they enrolled and the success they achieved due to networking opportunities.

**Theme 2: Caring and engaging faculty.** The participants had the opportunity to share their overall academic experience at the university to get a better understanding of what made them successful. For the majority of the students, they had great academic experiences at the university. They specifically identified the characteristics of the faculty members who enhanced their overall academic experience. They believed faculty members who challenged them academically created a more conducive learning environment. Those challenging faculty members created environments that pushed their students beyond their comfort zone and challenged them to think outside of the proverbial box. They also reflected on faculty members who were approachable and had an open door policy for their students. These faculty members created a welcoming environment and encouraged the students to establish a positive working relationship with them. The participants unanimously agreed they believed they learned the most from faculty members who were passionate about the subject matter. Their passion created an engaging environment, which revealed to the students that they cared about what they were teaching and the students learning process.

**Academic rigor.** Faculty members who brought academic rigor into the classroom continuously challenged the participants in a positive way. These faculty
members challenged the participants to learn so they would be prepared in their future careers. At times they struggled because the course was challenging, but through perseverance, hard work, and a positive working relationship with those faculty members, the participants believed they received the best education. One participant expressed his beliefs about being challenged in the classroom and how it motivated him to work harder and to be better prepared as a leader in his career.

Oh it’s been enjoyable, I’ve loved it. I’ve loved the challenging courses I’ve taken...things that don’t necessarily click I’m intrigued by it because that means that I need to work a little harder, and it lets me know that academic experiences challenge me to go to new heights, never to settle would be complacent and I think that’s important as a leader.

Another participant commented about a faculty member who challenged them academically, which added value to the education he was receiving.

He made sure that we had what it takes to, you know, be successful in the legal field. That’s something that I kind of admire you know, that’s what you want coming to a college setting you know, especially getting your money’s worth for a class that you take.

Approachability. The participants discussed how faculty approachability played a major role in their success at the university. Having the opportunity to meet with faculty members outside of the classroom further enhanced their relationship and created a caring and supportive environment. Faculty members who engaged students in conversation about the course and other courses, as well as, personal and professional development opportunities positively impacted their experience. A participant summed it best when he
spoke of a faculty member who engaged him in a variety of conversations outside of the classroom and how he appreciated this faculty member because he was fully invested in the overall academic success of the student.

...it’s like how approachable he is outside of the classroom and like he welcomes students to come talk to him and I just talk to him about what you’re doing with, like what you’re doing in his course but your other courses as well, just about like general things that are going on in the world, and to me that’s something I appreciate the most. Like this guy he’s taken a vested interest and wanting to get to know us, he’s not just our teacher...

The participants believed the relationships they built with faculty members outside of the classroom were more beneficial than the learning occurring inside the classroom. These faculty members became more of a support system than just an authority figure. He explained that the relationship he created with a faculty member outside of the classroom allowed him to gain a new fond respect for the faculty member, which made him value the course even more.

I think that I learned more from him as an individual than the actual class. Going into his office seeing how he was in tune with his creative side, had a lot of different projects he worked on... it kind of just opened me up to him and I think the class that I took...I hold it on a higher level than any other class because I built that relationship with him as a professor.

Passion for subject. The participants all agreed faculty member who were passionate about the subject matter created an engaging learning environment where all were involved in the process. The faculty member’s passion would intrigue the students
to want to learn because it added vigor to the subject and changed the overall student’s perceptions of a course and the faculty member. A participant reveled that students need faculty members to provide substance to a course in order to truly engage them in the learning process. Without that substance, learning was mundane and non-engaging. He stated, “students want soul to the material because words are words it’s what you make of it...we want to feel what’s going on, we don’t want to just read.” Participants applauded faculty who were passionate because they felt as if the faculty members cared about what they were teaching, which in turn made the students care. According to one participant, a faculty member’s passion in the subject provided him with an appreciation for learning and revealed to him what all faculty members should be like with students.

I genuinely learned so much...he was so interested about his subject that he made it just so engaging and involving with the students even if you didn’t want to be there. So that was the most beneficial because it opened my eyes about how professors should be like and how the interactions between students and the course work and professor should be.

Another participant shared how a passionate faculty member changed his mindset about a major and course so much that he considered changing his major. He said, "I wasn’t interested in advertising at all, and he’s so passionate about advertising that it made me consider switching my major."

Summary. The participants shared the reasons why they believed they were successful at the university had a lot to do with the caring and engaging faculty members they encountered throughout their years at the institution. They agreed that they learned best from faculty members who challenged them academically. They understood it was a
collegiate environment, so they wanted to be pushed to think so they were better prepared as leaders in their professions. They believed the faculty members who challenged them cared about their well-being and wanted them to be successful. They also realized they learned best from faculty members who were approachable both in and out-of-the-classroom. Once they were able to build these relationships, they began to respect the faculty member more and in turn enjoyed the class more. They also realized if a faculty member was passionate about his work, it enhanced the classroom environment and engaged them even more.

**Theme 3: Innovative teaching methods.** The participants were asked to share the type of teaching styles that significantly impacted their learning. They were adamant about what styles they liked and disliked. The types of teaching styles the participants vehemently disliked were classes solely taught through lectures built around a PowerPoint presentation or faculty who taught directly from a textbook. The participants had a lot to share about faculty members who used PowerPoint presentations as a main method of teaching, especially when the faculty member read the slides verbatim and did not add passion or discussion behind the lessons. One participant shared his many experiences with faculty members who only used PowerPoint presentations and read them verbatim. He believed this method did not provide the students with a fulfilling academic experience.

There’s an epidemic…this epidemic is professors who stand up in front of the classroom put on a PowerPoint and simply regurgitate what is on the PowerPoint and they call it a lecture. On more than one occasion this has been the case for
the classes I’ve taken and I think it’s a problem, mostly because I know for the most part students aren’t getting fulfilling experience out of that.

Another participant felt it was a waste of his time to listen to a faculty member read off of a PowerPoint presentation when they could do the same thing. He said, "Often you find a professor just reading off the PowerPoint while honestly I can go ahead and do the same when I read it myself." The participants also spoke about faculty members who read from the textbook and rarely connected what was in the book with real life examples.

I basically could have purchased the book and learned everything out of the book. He takes the book and just writes whatever examples are in the book on the board, he doesn’t explain it and that’s the end of it.

The participants also discussed their displeasure with tenured faculty members who were not engaging and taught the same way they taught years ago. One participant shared his frustration with tenured faculty members who use antiquated styles of teaching and how it appeared as if they did not care to put the time into changing their styles to adapt to current trends in teaching.

When you have certain professors that have tenure and they’ve been here for a long time and they seem like they used to know what they’re talking about but they’re a little past their time, it’s a little harder to stay focused in the class because of the teaching style. It’s a totally different world. So that shows that they’re not putting in the time to plan for the class adequately...

Overall, the participants explained they enjoyed faculty members who utilized a variety of teaching techniques such as practical real-world examples as a part of their lesson
plan. They also appreciated faculty who created an interactive and engaging classroom environment, which enhanced their overall learning environment. These faculty members were able to seamlessly connect what they were teaching and its real-world applicability.

Practical (real-world) learning. The participants all agreed they learned significantly more with faculty members who were able to link the information in the textbook to real-world scenarios. This technique encouraged the students to think beyond the classroom and apply the course materials to more practical concepts they were able to connect with. Some of the participants explained they learned best when their faculty members had outside experiences in the field of study in which they were teaching. A method, which was favored by the participants, was teaching through storytelling. Faculty members who had the ability to apply their personal experiences to the course content significantly enhanced their learning experience. A participant shared he had a better understanding of the course content because a faculty member shared her personal real-world experiences through storytelling.

So I just felt like her ability to relate real-world issues, actual issues that happened to her and it really like made the material that she was teaching more realistic...I was able to visualize it a lot more, I feel like that helps in the learning experience.

Another participant realized through storytelling he was able to better retain the information for future use. He believed his professor created an opportunity to learn in a different yet engaging environment, which helped to maintain his attention and interest in class.
He creates silly stories from his life…and it actually like you go out of class and you think back to that funny story, but somehow you remember that law or whatever it is and I really love that style because they take that personal aspect, combine it with the academic and then just feed it to you and it’s just something you always remember.

Some of the participants expressed how experiential learning opportunities such as field trips and guest speakers also enhanced their learning experience. These opportunities allowed them to link theory to practice and in return gain a better understanding of the subject matter. One participant shared his experience with faculty members who used field trips, guest speakers, and real-world marketing campaigns to enhance the learning environment. He believed these techniques reinforced what they were learning and made it enjoyable and attainable.

She takes us to sites to talk to professionals and ask real questions because textbooks don’t do that for you, you know... Another class is research communications; she brought a couple guest speakers to speak and another class, actually my PR strategies class, we worked with Nestle to develop a campaign, like we actually worked with a representative with Nestle so it was like a real experience aside to just working with groups in class. So it’s just little things like that it just made it a more flavorful class.

*Interactive and engaging classroom.* Participants explained they learned more in an interactive and engaging classroom environment. They appreciated the interaction with both their peers and the faculty member in the classroom. One participant shared he appreciated interaction in the classroom because he believed he not only learned from the
faculty members but also his peers. He said, "I value interaction a lot, I feel like not only can students learn from teachers they can learn from the comments that other students make." Another teaching style the participants believed was beneficial was the use of the Socratic Circle. The Socratic Circle provided the students and the faculty member with an opportunity to engage in a discussion in a less intimidating setting. When asked specifically about the Socratic Circle and how it helped them to learn, the students said they believed it provided an opportunity for everyone to be accountable for the conversation and to share their ideas on a topic. One participant believed this format created more access for question and answer with the faculty member and his peers.

It just gave you room to ask questions and discuss anything about the course and I think I got more out of it because I just got a chance to ask her what I wanted to ask her to get clarity on anything that I had maybe difficulties with, and also had the support of the class with me as well.

Summary. The participants said they believed faculty members who used a variety of innovative teaching methods impacted their academic experience the most. They enjoyed faculty members who had the ability to connect what they were teaching in class to practical real world learning outside of the classroom. They explained they learned best when they were able to connect theory to practice. They shared how experiential learning opportunities such as field trips added value to the lessons and created an engaging environment for the faculty and the students.

Theme 4: Motivations for success. The participants of the study were asked to reflect on their personal beliefs, motivations, and strengths, which significantly impacted their college career thus far. The majority of the responses heavily focused on family
support, the downfall of their family members or peers, and their own self-discipline as sources of motivation. Overwhelmingly, the students mentioned their family members as a major source of motivation. They spoke highly of the many sacrifices their family members endured so that they could go to college. The participants also used the downfalls of their family members and peers as motivation to enroll, retain, and persist to graduation. Some of the participants used the experiences such as family and peers not going to college, being incarcerated, and even dying as a source of motivation. Lastly, their self-discipline was a major factor that kept them enrolled. Many of the participants believed it was their internal drive that helped them to persist and either graduate or be on track to graduate.

*Family support.* When the participants were asked to explain why they decided to go to college, many stated it was not an option but more of an expectation. Family members engrained the concept from the onset that college was the next step in life after high school. One participant said,

Having the option of not going to college never existed….it was expected of us.

Going to college was the expectation in my family, it wasn’t like I’m going to get my high school degree and say well I’m done.

Having their family as a support system was critical to the success of the participants. They discussed how they were able to reach out to their family members and ask for help regarding anything they were struggling with or in need of to stay on the right path. For the participants, knowing there was someone there to guide them greatly impacted their experience. One participant shared his thoughts on how family support helped him to persist through college and without it, he believe it would be difficult to manage.
I would say the family...if I’m having trouble with anything just call my mom and ask her, or my dad, so having that support system, that foundation I think made a total difference you know. If you don’t have that strong family structure and foundation, you know, you’re going to have a hard time at some point.

Some of the participants used the sacrifices their family members had to endure to provide them with access and opportunity to get a college degree as a source of motivation. One participant shared his story about how his family consistently focused on providing for the next generation in order for them to be successful in life. He believed it would be an insult if he did not take advantage of the opportunities provided to him.

Well my grandfather and my grandmother they didn’t go to college themselves but probably I think, my grandfather says this all the time about what he’s most proud of, and he’s accomplished a lot, like started a business after he got out of the Army, like he started three supermarkets and he’s retired now, but so like he has a lot to be proud of but probably I would say his proudest accomplishment is the fact that he was able to send all his children and all his grandchildren to college. He says that all the time, and I just think that like seeing their hard work and the sacrifices that they made for us, both my parents and conversely for me to succeed, I just think that’s been my biggest influence because…they worked hard to achieve a better life for the next generation, and the next generation, and it’s like you can’t, it’s like they essentially put the ladder up for you and it’s on you to climb it.
Other participants spoke about how they looked up to their family members who were successful. Through their hard work and dedication they were able to achieve what they wanted out of life. One participant shared his admiration for his mother’s accomplishments in life and how her experience motivated him to be successful.

My mother is the number one driver I would say for me. She drives me not because of what she tells me, she drives me because of...how she conducts herself, how she just goes day in and day out, fights, fights, fights to get what she wants at her job. She’s very stressed 24/7 but she never really complains about it. She gets everything done. She went to college; she paid her way through college also, so she had it a little bit differently than me.

*Downfall of family/peers.* A few participants also discussed how their source of motivation was based on what they experienced at home and in their neighborhoods. Many of their friends and family members were either incarcerated or murdered due to poor choices. Some of the participants expressed the need to get out of their negative environments in order to succeed in life. They used the downfall of family members or peers as the catalyst to change the direction of their lives. The participants used these negative experiences in their family and peers’ lives as teachable moments to keep them motivated and focused on the end goal. A participant explained how he was motivated to be successful by the downfall of his two stepbrothers and some of his friends.

I have two stepbrothers ...who were exposed to the same things that I was exposed to; we were raised in the same home. However, both didn’t go to college, one has a child he’s struggling and the second one actually fell into the proverbial trap and he’s now a part of the system so to speak and to me it was just, how can I put this,
just seeing like I know friends who also have fallen through the trap and just seeing like where they are in their lives and just knowing that, that’s always helped me to stay on the right path.

Another participant explained his rationale for attending college was primarily due to the negative circumstances his friends were enduring, and he wanted more for himself. He wanted to maintain his focus in life.

I decided to go to college honestly because I saw where all my peers were going. I saw that my mom moved us from the Bronx and tried to get us away from a lifestyle that she grew up in and then it kind of followed us while I was in Richmond, Virginia, and so I saw how, you know, life doesn’t always turn out how you always want it to but you know it has to be something that gets the people that we aspire to be, where they are and so I knew that even though I was kind of like some of my best friends, especially junior and senior year getting shot, getting locked up for life. It just wasn’t for me; I knew that I needed to stay fast to my goals.

Another reflected on how he narrowly escaped death when he was supposed to be hanging out with his peers, and all of them were shot dead in a car. He used that life altering experience as motivation to succeed and to memorialize his friends.

I got a call that my boys got shot and like the proximity to where my house is... everybody that was in the car got killed and so to me it was like wow...I was the only one missing...knowing that that came so close to me and my mom ...that really motivates me to make sure that I make sure my friends are proud you know. I make sure that they didn’t die in vain you know.
Self-discipline. The participants also shared that it was also their self-discipline that was a major source of their motivation to succeed. They discussed wanting more for themselves especially when others did not believe in their abilities. While in high school, the participants also realized it was their self-discipline, which prompted them to want to go to college and be successful. Similar to the students who had positive academic experiences in high school, the students who had a mediocre experience expressed a need for something more in life. A participant shared the reason why he wanted to go to college was because he did not want to work a minimum wage job the rest of his life; he wanted more for himself.

I originally decided I wanted to attend college because I wanted to be somebody one day. I didn’t want to just work at a fast food chain my whole life or work at a Foot Locker my whole life. So I decided I really wanted to go to college and just better myself and be educated.

Some participants believed their peers did not go to college because they lacked self-discipline. They shared the importance of being a leader and not a follower and taking action into their own hands. Specifically they spoke about their ability to not be influenced by others actions or decisions. One participant shared what he believed helped him to persevere and not get caught up in negative situations.

I would say knowing who you are. A lot of people got caught up in peer pressure and all this bunch of stuff, but I really honestly have never had a problem of never standing up for myself and saying no, it’s not who I am, it’s not what I do and that’s something I developed myself…
The participants were asked to share what factors they believed were different for them in comparison to their peers who were not as successful. They said they believed their peers lacked motivation. One participant believed that to be true and explained the need to be consistent while in college in order to be successful. He said, “...I think it’s the lack of motivation is what probably keeps people down and as well as consistency in my opinion because you need to be consistent throughout your college career.” They shared the importance of not allowing typical personal and social concerns to get in the way of their success and the need to separate themselves from negative influences. Once participant shared the value of being in the moment and focusing at the task at hand in order to be successful.

I tell myself to be smart. Like it doesn’t matter we’re in the same class and that’s a chance for me to show myself in that point in time. It doesn’t matter what I’m wearing when I’m in class, it doesn’t matter what’s going on at home at that point in time, it’s like I’m here, like I say I’d be fully present to the moment and just engage myself. So for me it’s like hey you know, whatever happens you have to separate yourself, you know, you’re here already, so it’s like you know, whatever issue I have I have to like turn them off in the moment and just focus on class and get that done.

The participants understood the importance of continuously challenging themselves so they could further develop their skill sets and take advantage of the opportunities available on campus. One participant shared how he challenged himself to do better each year in order to diversify his experience and be fully engaged at the university.
I just want to be successful. Being successful means that you have to put in the work. This school is very, very competitive. This school also is hard but at the same time, this school is very good at preparing students for what they have to come in the real world. There’s a lot of times where I feel like I could have done something better and then next year I come back knowing that I did this one way last year and I want to do it differently this year. So I come back every year and I thank God that he allows me to even come back because a lot of students aren’t able to come back because maybe financial problems or home situations. So he’s blessed me every year being able to come back, but yeah, every year I just want to do better, I just want to get that better GPA. I want to try to get into that new program that maybe the school started. I want to be the new face for whatever this organization or that organization, so I just want to do better every year.

Many of the participants spoke about the importance of self-discipline in creating a legacy. As first-generation college students, they were motivated by being the first in the family to attain a college degree. Through their perseverance and self-discipline anything was possible. A participant shared his thoughts on starting a legacy for his family for being the first to attain a college degree through his self-discipline.

For me being the first in my family to come to school I knew, I feel like I’m starting a legacy and like this is something new. For my sister, you know, I want to lead her to make sure that if I can do this with my terrible GPA you definitely can do this. You could definitely do this…it’s for everyone. I really want everyone to believe that in my family and I want to show that this is something that we all can do.
Summary. The participants believed they were motivated to be successful because of their family support, witnessing the downfalls of their family and peers, and their self-discipline. Family members encouraged academic excellence from the very beginning. They were encouraged to go to college and graduate even though, for some of them, their family members did not go to college. The participants used the sacrifices of their family members as a source of motivation to remain steadfast to their goal of graduating. The participants also discussed how they used the downfall of their family members and peers as a source of motivation. Unfortunately, many of their family members and peers experienced death and incarcerations as a result of poor decisions in life. The participants decided they did not want to become a statistic, so they used the peers’ and family members’ downfalls as a lesson and source of motivation to achieve more. All of the participants unanimously agreed it was self-discipline that was their driving force throughout college. They believed self-discipline helped them to stay focused and achieve their goals. When they compared themselves to their peers who were not as successful, they believed their peers lacked the support and self-discipline needed to succeed in college.

Theme 5: Personal development and community support. The participants had the opportunity to share their levels of involvement both on and off campus. This information was gathered in order to examine the reasons why the participants chose to get involved in the various activities, discuss any opportunities afforded to them due to their involvement, and identify the transferrable skills they developed which enhanced their classroom experience. When asked, the majority of the participants stated they wanted to be involved in activities and programs to be with like-minded peers and to give
back to the community. The participants benefited greatly through their active involvement. Besides using their involvement as a resume booster, they were offered opportunities due to their involvement. They also realized as a result of their active involvement outside of the classroom, they developed certain transferable skills, which impacted their overall academic experience in the classroom environment.

Be with like-minded peers. Many of the participants understood the importance of being involved on-campus, as it would strengthen their overall academic experience at the university. Upon arriving on campus, they wanted to connect with other Black students who were focused on personal enrichment. One participant shared his experience with wanting to connect with like-minded peers and how it impacted his overall experience and development as a Black male in college.

It was like okay I know that I’m a Black male and I’m interested in becoming educated so there’s got to be more than just me out here. Just because I may be one of a few in my high school that’s trying to do it, there’s got to be tons of us so the chance to meet other Blacks who are just like excited about learning, excited about being Black, excited about being in college, that was like, I ran for those things, you know once I found out about them and it really changed my perspective about me and my whole community and us as people, so that’s like kept me definitely engaged and I feel like that’s a huge part of it.

Many of the participants were involved in culturally based organizations, which focused on uplifting, enlightening, and educating the community. As Black males they understood the importance of being a Black male leader in college and the responsibilities that came with it. The participants used these organizations as their
outlets to make a difference in their community. One participant shared that he wanted to become involved with other leaders on campus in order to impact change at the university and the outside community.

I chose to get involved in those activities because I wanted to be around leaders or people who wanted to be leaders because I wanted to be a leader because in my mind a leader is someone who can make change or have influence.

Give back to community. The majority of the students were involved in both on and off campus programs and clubs. When asked why they got involved, they stated they wanted to give back to the community. One participant said, “I think there’s no higher honor than serving your community.” The participants wanted to be a resource for other students of color. They believed that through their experiences, they would be able to help others to be successful at the university. One participant explained that he wanted to provide a glimpse into the student experience at the university so others would be aware of the many services and opportunities available to them.

I got involved …because I wanted to… give them a little a more of a personal experience about how St. John’s is and so you know, I wanted to make sure that students here, like potential students got the real deal at St. John’s you know, like it’s a great school you know, it can help you out in many different ways.

Many of the students also enjoyed giving back to the outside community. They specifically worked with local high schools in impoverished neighborhoods to provide them with access to a college environment. They believed that providing access would positively influence the students and impact their decisions about going to college. A
participant shared his experience with community service and how mentoring and tutoring became a passion for him.

Like I said I do a lot of community service, I’ve like been all over the place doing every type of service but like I realized that mentoring is like my big thing, mentoring and tutoring I love doing that with the kids even mentoring and tutoring kids on campus, that’s big.

Opportunities afforded. The students shared the many opportunities they were afforded due to their involvement both on and off campus. These included internship opportunities, networking opportunities, and the ability to build their resume for their future careers. One participant reflected on how he was able to get an exclusive internship because of his involvement on campus.

Because of my involvement I would say out of 200 students here at the university I was one of five to be picked to be an intern for the U.S. Postal Inspector’s office. That’s currently one of hardest jobs to get into because you need a Homeland Security background check.

He also shared how invaluable his experience was because of the practical skills and knowledge he gained through this internship. Another student spoke about his summer internship as a teacher’s assistant to high school students and how his involvement played a major role in earning that internship.

I would say this summer I got offered an internship at Columbia to be a mentor to incoming, cause the program, high school students, juniors and seniors they come to Columbia so they can take courses, and they also get to live on campus. So I’ll be one of the teaching assistants for the program and at night I will serve as a
resident student for the students. So I would say my involvement in orientation and also all these organizations such as the newspaper and the Daily Journal, and my GPA, I think all that made it possible for me to get such an internship.

The participants explained that due to their involvement with other students who were focused, they gained access to many other opportunities both on and off campus through information sharing. They supported each other and provided key information on scholarships, jobs, internships, and so on when they became aware of them. This sharing created a community of learners focused on community building and development. One participant shared this phenomenon because he believed it helped him with many opportunities.

Well alright, so if you’re involved in something and the people who you’re around all the time are constantly looking for opportunities or they come across opportunities and they tell you about it that’s one way which you’ll know about opportunities off campus, so being a part of like list serves you know… and you can get information about opportunities outside of campus.

The participants understood the value of being involved and the importance for potential employers to see they were able to balance an academic and co-curricular life while in college. They shared how their involvement provided tangible experiences they could use during an interview. One participant stated, "...you need something to put on your resume at the end of the day and when you can put something ...on your resume, something that you’re passionate about it gives you something to talk about in that interview.” They realized potential employers were honing in on these experiences in order to gain a better understanding of what students did while on campus and how it
related to the job. A participant shared his experience with a potential employer who specifically focused on his involvement as an orientation leader and a peer leader at the university.

I had an interview recently and when they were looking over my resume those two positions on campus...were what they focused on the most. So I think that it definitely benefits you in like potential job searches and stuff.

The participants realized what they learned as a result of being involved went beyond just something they could put on a resume. Their involvement developed them as leaders and prepared them for the future. As one participant explained his involvement was an experience that positively impacted his life, which he believed was most valuable.

The things I’ve learned from being involved...has definitely helped me out off campus, or just like in general, because I mean there’s a lot of things you can’t put on paper, it’s something more that you carry along with yourself, that you’ve learned, a life experience and I think that definitely shows when I go to a job interview...that’s definitely something I’ll take away from these organizations that I’ve been involved with.

*Development of transferable skills.* The participants explained how their involvement further developed certain skills, which easily transferred into the classroom environment and enhanced their overall learning experience. They said they believed as a result of the work they were involved in, they were able to further develop their time management and communication skills. The participants realized their ability to manage time effectively both in and out of the classroom was essential to their college success. A participant shared how his involvement helped him with time management and overall
responsibility. He stated, “I think the skills that you pick up doing extracurricular activities helps you manage your time better and to be responsible and be aware of due dates, when you have to get stuff done.” In the beginning some of the participants had difficulty learning how to manage their responsibilities with their organizations, their course work, and their personal lives. The work they did in their organizations taught them how to effectively balance their competing priorities. Since many of the participants held high-level positions in their organizations, they learned how to prioritize and manage their time effectively to meet the demands of their positions. Once they were able to manage their organizational priorities, they applied the same skill in the classroom. One participant summed this best when he said, "Being involved I know like it takes a lot to prepare anything whether it’s you know a program, I realize that same type of preparation is what needs to be done in class too."

The second skill they developed due to their involvement was their communication skills. As a result of the day-to-day operations of being a leader in a student organization or university program, they had to consistently communicate with both small and large groups about planning, budgeting, and marketing of events. Through these interactions they were able to further develop this skill and apply it in the classroom setting. One participant explained he was shy before he got involved. His involvement outside the classroom helped him to become more confident to speak to both small and large crowds and not feel intimidated. He realized this skill further enhanced how he interacted with his peers and faculty in the classroom, which ultimately increased his satisfaction of the course.
I used to be the shy type I didn’t want to talk as much and now I feel like I’m more open and outgoing, I feel like I’m able to interact with people a lot more, that helps me inside the classroom getting along with classmates, getting along with professors and by doing that I almost enjoy the classes more which makes, which enhances my work.

**Summary.** The participants credited much of their success to their involvement on campus. It is through their involvement they were able to connect with like-minded peers who wanted to be successful in college. They believed this network of peers who were focused on personal development and the support of the community impacted their college experience. They explained how these networks provided access to opportunities both on and off campus because everyone was focused on the success of the Black community. The participants also explained how they were afforded many job and internship opportunities because they were involved on campus. When they interviewed for jobs or internships, the employer would focus on their involvement on campus and the participants were able to connect what they were involved in to the responsibilities of the job. They believed they learned many life lessons as a result of their involvement and that is why they continue to motivate other Black males to get involved on campus. The participants realized they were developing certain skill such as time management and communication skills as a result of their involvement. These skills were refined outside of the classroom as a result of their involvement and they brought those skills back into the classroom, which enhanced their overall academic experience.

**Theme 6: Reasons for departure.** The participants had an opportunity to deliberate on the reasons why some of their peers left the university before they were to
The three main reasons discussed were financial concerns, not being academically prepared, and a lack of self-discipline. These areas are presented in this section in order to provide an explanation for the reasons the participants believed their peers left the university.

Financial concerns. The participants unanimously stated the main reason many of their peers left the university was because it was too expensive. The participants expressed even though they received substantial financial aid packages their first year, financial support seemed to decrease from year to year. This situation ultimately influenced their decision to remain at the institution. They also expressed a lack of knowledge on the financial aid process as a factor that forced their peers out. A participant expressed his frustrations with the current practices and expressed the need to better educate the students.

...grants that are given one semester and not given another semester. I think that’s a big part of it. I feel if you accept a student into an institution and you give them a package that says that they can afford to go to this school...as long as they keep their academics up I believe they should stay, you know. Also, if they knew what was going on...like their financial responsibilities, I think some of them would have stayed.

The students also mentioned their out-of-state peers who left the university because they could not afford it and could not receive any state aid. A participant shared his experience with this situation regarding his friend who was not from the New York metropolitan area.
The school is overly costly. I believe now if I’m correct it’s about $52,000, between $48,000 and $52,000 to attend the university. So even students that come from outside the New York State area they don’t receive TAP, and if I’m correct they don’t receive PELL, you know, because those are state grants. They’re paying out of pocket or they’re taking out all these loans. I have a friend that lives in Jersey and she’s up to about $110,000 already in loans.

The participants also shared that many of their peers paid for college on their own and had other financial obligations such as rent, food, and transportation, which added to their overall budget. A participant summed this situation best and agreed this was yet another reason why his peers were frustrated and left the university.

I also think a lot of it is economic reasons because school is expensive and if the expectation is I’m paying X amount of dollars a year, you know, how am I going to fund this, can I really juggle a job, you know…how am I really going to pay my rent…I think that’s a very big underlying issue, economic.

Not academically prepared. The majority of the participants explained how their high school did not adequately prepare them to be successful in college. Many of them discussed how the high school teachers did not challenge or truly prepare them for the rigors of a college environment. One participant shared how he believed his teachers were doing the bare minimum in order to meet a certain standard.

During high school a lot of what was going on was just trying to achieve the bare minimum, not just from like a student perspective but also the teachers, I felt like they also were just doing the minimum needed to get by to meet quotas, to meet...
standards and I think as a result maybe students like myself, I didn’t really feel challenged in certain aspects.

For the majority of the participants, they were able to acclimate quickly to the new demands and learned how to manage their college workload on their own. They explained how their high school taught them exactly what not to do in order to be successful in college. A participant shared his experience with doing it all on his own and the things he had to change as a result of being in college.

I feel that much of the preparation came on my own part and not so much at all really from high school. High school taught me what not to do and taught me the wrong ways to prepare for classes, how to approach a class or something like that. I feel like in college, like I had to prepare myself for college. So I knew once I got into college, you know, I can’t just get by, I can’t do homework the same day that it’s due, I knew like different ways of what not to do.

Many of their peers who may have had similar experiences did not transition into the college setting as smoothly. The participants shared many stories about their peers who attended the university but did not take it seriously and it affected their academic standing, so they had to leave the university. They explained their peers did not understand the ramifications of being in a college setting and the high academic expectations of college professors. The participants spoke about the importance of working hard to succeed, but unfortunately many of their peers got to college and they lacked the tenacity.

They don’t know the skills as far as they got to work, they got to consistently work hard, and they got to consistently understand that it is competitive. A lot of
people don’t understand that, a lot of people don’t realize that until they get here and then they get overwhelmed and that becomes too much.

They also shared another reason why so many of their peers left the university was because they were focused solely on the social aspects. They came to school thinking it would be what they saw on television or the movies and allowed that to be their guide to a college education. One participant stated, “If you are focused on academics then everything else aligns. It is those who focus solely on the social aspects of college rather than the academics who tend to be overwhelmed with the college environment.” Many of the participants explained how their parents would not only talk about the importance of a college education but also the need to work hard. One participant shared his thoughts on the role parents should play in preparing their children for college. He believed it is necessary for parents to not only instill the notion of getting a good job after college but also really preparing them for the rigors of college.

Parents will instill in their students, I mean their children, college is the necessary tool to get a good job. Yes, but it’s so much more than that. You have to prepare people, you have to really get people ready to be able to excel, you have to get people ready to put in that hard work.

*Lack of self-discipline.* The participants explained how the university provided an environment where Black males could be successful. They spoke about the many resources and opportunities available but according to one participant, it was up to the student to take advantage of the resources.

I feel like there are a lot of opportunities for Black males at St. John’s. A lot of opportunities to get involved and a lot of opportunities to get engaged, but I just
think that again it falls on you as an individual to take advantage of these things. It’s like someone can open the door for you it’s just up to you to walk through it.

They said they believed their peers could have been more successful at the university if they did not lack self-discipline. A participant explained the reason why he believed Black males were leaving the university was because they were not prepared for the college setting. He explained that they come to college and they do not have the skills to successfully manage their total independence.

I think that many of the Black males don’t necessarily have a firm grasp on that sense of freedom that you get when you come to college, about how everything is on you, how it’s complete and total independence, and that may be overwhelming for them because they were never truly taught about it.

The participants realized how self-discipline played a major role in their success. They understood the value of hard work and perseverance and wanted their peers who were not as successful to start taking more ownership in their role as a college student. A participant shared his candor regarding Black males and the need for more of them to be motivated and to take their work seriously.

...if I’m speaking candidly I would like to see some of our other Black students mainly take their work a little more seriously at times because I see people being preoccupied a lot with outside things...I think that we can motivate ourselves better.

During the interviews the participants shared the importance taking full advantage of their academic experience in order to succeed. They witnessed that many of their peers who left the university were not fully invested, and they did not live up to their
potential. One participant explained what he would say to his peers about the consequences of their poor decisions and the need for them to get as much out of the college experience since they will be paying for it for many years to come.

I try to tell everybody all the time, like you come to school for a reason. You’re spending all this money, you’re going to be in debt for years off this school, why not get everything you could possibly squeeze out of the school. Why skip class and stay in your dorm and do whatever you do in your dorm rooms instead of going to class when you know you’re going to have to pay for it at the end of the day anyway.

The participants also mentioned their concerns with their peers who came to an academic setting and perpetuated many of the negative stereotypes associated with Black males. They did not understand why students would come to a place of higher learning and not conduct themselves in a manner becoming of a college student. One participant stated he took responsibility for his peers and explained how the negative behavior affects all Black males.

I would say on behalf of all Black males at St. John’s I would probably take the responsibility in terms of our behavior you know, how we conduct ourselves in public... hollering at females...playing loud music...being loud, obnoxious, doing like unnecessary things…just all in all making us look bad, you know.

Summary. The participants believed the reasons why their peers left the university was because of financial concerns, not being academically prepared, and the lack of self-discipline. All of the participants stated they believed the university was too expensive. They explained how many of their peers who came to the university because
of a financial package but did not continue because the aid seemed to fluctuate from year to year. They did not understand why this happened but they blamed the policy and practices of the university as a major reason. They concluded if their peers were more knowledgeable about the process and knew how to properly manage their aid, then they would still be in attendance. For some, they realized many of their peers who come from outside of New York State had to return and attend a community or state college because they took out loans and could not receive state funded grants. They also credited the many other financial obligations such as paying for rent, transportation, and food. They believed all of these elements played a role in their peers not being able to return.

The participants realized their high school did not adequately prepare them for college. They said they were fortunate enough to acclimate quickly unlike many of their peers who were focused more on the social aspects of college rather than academics. They explained they did not understand why their peers were wasting their time and money. The participants admitted it was a lack of self-discipline that caused their peers to leave the university. They believed their peers came to an environment where there was no supervision of academic responsibilities and allowed their newfound freedom to get in the way of their success. The participants stated that their peers were not motivated, and they did not take college seriously. They also realized many of their peers continued to perpetuate some of the negative stereotypes associated with Black males, which were not conducive to a college environment.

**Theme 7: Support services needed for success.** The participants were asked to consider the type of support the university should provide to better assist Black males. The first suggestion was a mentoring program to better assist Black males with the
transition to college. They believed an upperclassman would provide the basic understanding of a college environment and assist incoming students in connecting to the university much quicker than on their own. The participants also suggested better communication of financial and other support services on campus. They explained how better communication of these processes and services would have helped many of their peers who left the university too soon. The final suggestion was purposeful engagement of Black males in high school. They believed if the university engaged Black males earlier, it would create more access and opportunities for understanding the demands of a college education.

*Mentoring program.* The participants expressed the importance and value of providing a mentoring program for incoming Black males. They discussed the significance of first-year students being introduced to the many opportunities on campus and the reasons why they should take advantage of them. One participant explained that by connecting Black males to successful peers the students would feel as if they were linked to a group who values them and wants to see them succeed.

I would say one would be a mentorship program, just to have older African-American students who are successful academically to look up to, to kind of guide them through, and make them feel like they’re involved in or that they can feel a sense of belongingness...So I think the key is helping them feel like they belong to groups that relate to them.

The participants believed a mentoring program would provide students with the support and guidance needed to succeed but from the perspective of a peer. They realized how important peer-to-peer support was when they arrived on campus and how influential it
was to their success. A participant discussed the importance of linking a first-year student to a peer who knows and understands the environment and can provide pertinent tips for success. He said he believed Black males would benefit from this type of program because someone cared about their success.

Somebody that can coach you, somebody that’s been there before, or somebody that you respect you know. I think that would be significant, like a great, great, great way to make sure that you can keep and make the Black men feel like they’re appreciated here. I think a lot of students come in and they don’t really know exactly what they want to do but they have an idea of what they want to do. They just don’t know how to get from point A to point B, and I feel like a lot of the time they might be scared or might not know who to go and talk to about this, to talk about maybe their goals or helping them figure out what their goals might be. So I feel like just guidance from maybe like it could be a program or some sort of groups that meet with them where other students can meet with other students who are in the same position as them where they can sort of just like share information and share their stories so they can know ho you know, I’m not the only one that feel like this, I’m not the only one who doesn’t really know what I want to do yet. I’m not the only one who feels overwhelmed right now and through that I feel like they can reach out and I think that can help overcome a lot of barriers.

The participants provided some insight on what the mentors should share with the high school students. They believed mentors should be honest about expectations and the hard
work so when new students finally arrive, the expectations are not a shock. One participant’s comment on this situation summed up the conversations best.

I feel like they should know that college isn’t supposed to be easy, it’s supposed to challenge you, you’re supposed to work to get your degree, it’s not going to be handed to you. But as long as you just put the effort in, like it’s going to pay off in the long run and you should know like if you get you college degree and you work hard, you will see success and as long as they know that, it should motivate them a little bit more to get their degree.

Better communication of resources. The participants concluded the university has many support services to further assist students toward academic success, but a difficulty was the lack of communication and education about these opportunities. In regards to financial support, the majority stated the university needed to do a better job at educating the students about the financial aid process and scholarship opportunities available. As discussed, the participants believed if their peers understood the process better or knew how to manage their financial portfolio, they would have not left the university when their aid changed.

The participants spoke about the many resources available to students to help them succeed. They urged the university to make a concerted effort to connect Black males to these resources from the onset. A participant shared that when he arrived on campus he did not know about many of the resources available. He believed if the university connected students early, it would be beneficial to academic success. He said, “…maybe the school should promote these programs to African-American males so they can come and get extra help.” Another participant spoke about the general student who
was on campus everyday and did not interact with university staff on regular basis. He believed it would be hard for that type of student to get connected to the right people for the services they needed.

I think a lot of students just don’t know who to go to at times to speak and if you’re not let’s say a student that’s here every single day you may not have the same interactions with administrators or faculty as someone who literally has to leave right after class to go to their internship and would never have the time just to speak to people on campus to get help.

The participants believed their involvement on campus played a role in connecting them to the resources and support services on campus, which enhanced their college experience. They discussed how apprehensive most incoming students are to connect with a faculty member or an administrator because it seems intimidating. A participant suggested a way for the university to show they are committed to the success of Black males is by connecting them to Black administrators and faculty who are committed to their success and communicate to them the university resources they could utilize to help them succeed.

So maybe it’s the first week of school you have like a little conference or workshop where you have predominantly Black male and female professors and administrators here saying hey listen you know, now the expectation is for you to graduate, we also want you to utilize the resources you have.

*Engagement of local high schools.* The participants expressed the need for the university to ignite the flame of motivation in the younger generation so they could espouse going to college and obtaining a degree. In order to achieve such a goal, the
participants suggested the university should engage local high schools in the neighborhood as a form of support. They believed by investing in Black males in local high schools, it would provide access and further motivate the youth to want to go to college. Through this initiative, the high school students would begin to understand they too could strive for a college degree and attain one, especially if they see people who look like them achieving their goals. Participants explained how successful college students could be used as mentors to these students and encourage them to want to go to college and work hard.

I feel like we need to go back and go through high schools and... if somebody 18 or 17, 16 in high school sees somebody that’s 18, 19 in college and idolizes them, then we could actually have more people willing to want to come to college and willing to put in the work.

Another participant agreed and reflected on his high school experience and how it did not prepare him for the college environment. He explained the need for preparing high school students for college by bringing them to campus and having them connect with other successful Black males to discuss their experiences. He offered some suggestions on how this initiative could further assist Black males in high school.

Collaborating with high schools in terms of preparing them, preparing Black males for what college is, what they can expect out of it and again not just lecturing at them but physically bringing them to college and maybe having other successful Black males talk with them about what their experience have been in college and the reinforcing that with focus groups perhaps, excursions as well to get them motivated about their new environment so they’ll be learning. It
shouldn’t be a surprise to them of the workload and the commitment that it takes when you enter college. It should really be developed while there’re in high school because that’s why some leave because they’re just not ready for it, they were not prepared for it and they don’t feel that the will be able to work to be able to be successful here. So I feel anything you do in high schools to prepare the more for them to come here I think would help.

Summary. The participants shared a few ideas regarding the support services the university should implement to positively influence Black male graduation rates. They believed a mentoring program would benefit Black males entering the university because it would link them to a positive role model who would guide and support them. They spoke about the importance of support during the first year as it sets the foundation for the remaining years. The participants were able to speak about the many support services the university had to offer but for some of them, they did not know about it until after they were engaged on campus. They suggested the university should do a better job at communicating the resources to Black males to instill in them that the university cares about their overall academic experience.

They believed the resources should be communicated through faculty and administrators who are determined to increase Black male graduation rates because this would connect the students to valuable resources on campus. This would especially be beneficial to students who were too intimated to approach university administration. The participants also acknowledged support needs to begin in the local high schools in order to impact change. They suggested the university should engage with local high schools to provide Black males with an opportunity to experience college on a regular basis.
They recounted their own high school experiences and explained if they had a better understanding of what college was about, they would have been better prepared. By engaging Black males from local high schools and connecting them to successful Black males in college, they would be motivated to go to college.

**Triangulation.** The data gathered from the individual interviews, the focus group, and the archival data were analyzed in order to examine data convergence. The archival data provided the participant’s home state, grade point average, and level of involvement on campus. Analysis revealed the only area of data convergence was regarding the participant’s desire to attend a diverse university. Triangulation was attempted for other areas but did not reveal positive results. This section, therefore, only focuses on the desire to attend a diverse university.

One area of similarity was that all of the participants attended high schools that were either predominately White or set in urban areas. The participants all indicated they decided to attend St. John’s University because of the diverse environment, and they understood the added value of being a part of a diverse learning environment. One participant said he chose to attend school in New York City was because of how different it was from where he came from. “I chose to come to St. John’s because one it was different from Maryland and two the diversity.” Another participant who came from a high school that was not diverse described his experience when he arrived to campus and how it was so welcoming to see so many different races and ethnicities.

Coming out of high school it was not the most diverse…so coming to St. John’s it almost hits you in the face a little bit your first day. You come around and you see just so many different races and so many different backgrounds when I’m
used to basically just seeing a thousand White people…at my high school…everyone is kind of together and everyone seemed more welcoming here.
That’s what I liked about the school…

**Summary of Results**

The four research questions that guided the study and allowed for discovery were as follows:

1. What type of in-class pedagogical practices had a significant impact on the learning of Black college males;
2. What are the specific non-cognitive factors which had a significant impact on Black college males;
3. What types of educationally purposeful activities/clubs enhance the in-class learning for Black college males; and
4. What are some of the barriers which impede accomplishing persistence and graduation and to what degree can they be addressed through policy and practices invoked by university administrators?

At the conclusion of the study, six findings emerged from the data presented. These findings offer insight to parents of Black males, high school officials, and university official on what is needed to successfully enroll, retain, and graduate Black males at predominately-White institutions. The findings offer insight on decision-making practices at predominately White institutions that are concerned with the graduation rates of Black males.

**Students are drawn to St. John’s for the uniqueness of campus offerings.** The participants shared how the diverse student population was a major contributor to their
success. They realized interacting with a diverse group of students enhanced their overall experience. They learned from students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds, which allowed them to gain various perspectives on life and learning. The participants enjoyed opportunities to engage in conversations with diverse groups and recognized the significance of the interactions on their academic achievement. The students said they never experienced racism on campus nor had any confrontations with their White counterparts or instructors. They believed this phenomenon was partly due to the location of the university in a diverse metropolitan city. The participants believed the diverse environment allowed them to fit into the campus and feel as if they were just another student.

The location of the university was also an opportunity to stay close to home while being immersed in a global market. The participants explained how having access to one of the most global cities in the nation provided connections to internships and careers in their field of study. They also realized Manhattan played a major role in their educational process because of the connections to the alumni from the university. Many of the students who went on an interview for internship and job opportunities were amazed at how many St. John’s alumni were in the field.

All of the study participants reflected on the generous financial aid package they received from the university and how that played a significant role in their decision to attend. Although going to college was seen as being the next step after high school for most of the participants, paying for it was a factor. The participants shared many stories about their fear about paying for a good college education and how St. John’s, through the mission to provide a college education to the poor youth of New York, provided an
opportunity to achieve their dream. The financial aid they received from the university created an opportunity to attend college and seven of the participants were the first in their family to go to college.

**Students need a variety of support systems to be successful while in college.**

The participants of the study mentioned how the support they received from their family members, faculty, and peers were what motivated them to succeed while in college. Their ability to reach out to this network of support when they were in need impacted their learning and desire to persist at the university.

Families provided motivation, an early desire to be academically successful, and role modeled the importance of a college education. Many of the participants shared how their family members motivated them to go to college and obtain a degree. They engrained the concept of attending college from the very beginning. For the parents, college was not viewed as an option but more of an expectation. Even though some of the family members did not attend college, the participants credited them as effective motivators and supporters. The participants also shared how they wanted to make their family members proud of their accomplishments and give back the gift by successfully attaining a college degree.

Having a strong supportive relationship with faculty and staff on campus was associated with higher levels of satisfaction with college for the participants. The participants disclosed how those faculty members who were approachable and had an open-door policy for students to engage in conversations about personal or course-related materials were the ones who motivated them to succeed. The participants reflected on the reasons why some of their peers were not as successful, and it had to do with the lack
of positive relationships with faculty and staff. It was through these relationships the
participants gained access to beneficial opportunities both on and off campus such as
engagement opportunities, internships, jobs, and scholarships. The participants explained
that those interactions showed them there was someone on campus who cared about
them. These interactions greatly impacted student satisfaction and in turn positively
influenced retention and persistence.

Peers also played a significant role in the academic success of the participants.
The peer groups provided both academic and social support and an opportunity for the
sharing of ideas and strategies to be successful while in college. The participants
explained how their peers who were motivated to be successful created an environment
where they challenged and supported each other. They were recruited by other Black
upper-classmen to get involved on campus. Surrounding themselves with positive and
successful Black leaders helped them stay away from negative influences. Their
connection to peer groups on campus further expanded their network and provided
opportunities to help other incoming Black students get acclimated to the university
setting. Mentoring with peers who knew and understood the system was beneficial to the
success of the participants.

**Students learn best when faculty incorporate a variety of engaging teaching
techniques in the classroom, which are linked to relevant situations.** The study
participants provided a better understanding of the type of teaching and learning
environments they believed was most beneficial to their success. The students explained
how faculty members who used a variety of techniques such as collaborative learning,
connecting lessons to real-world practice, and actively engaging their students in the
classroom were most beneficial to their success. The participants expressed that they really enjoyed when faculty were able to connect what they were learning in the classroom with more practical and tangible experiences. They believed they enjoyed this more because it made the material relevant to their day-to-day experiences outside of the classroom. They expressed their unwillingness to learn from a professor who only taught using lecture style as the main tool of teaching.

Some of the students also recognized how experiential learning opportunities such as field trips and guest speakers enhanced their learning experience. These opportunities allowed them to link theory to practice and in return gain a better understanding of the subject matter. They agreed faculty members should use these teaching techniques where appropriate in order to better engage their students. When they were placed in learning environments that engaged them with their peers and their faculty member, their chances of grasping and understanding information presented increased. The participants also established personalized relationships with their peers and the faculty member, which impacted achievement. They expressed the need for more interaction and tangible examples in order to grasp the knowledge in a more holistic manner.

Students who are involved outside of the classroom increase their level of interaction with peers and faculty, enhance basic proficiencies, and are afforded opportunities. The students believed engagement in educationally purposeful activities outside of the classroom deeply influenced their learning, development, racial identity, social integration, and retention at the university. The participants shared how their involvement in high school created the desire to become involved in college because they realized how it positively influenced academic achievement. Their motivation to be
involved in same-race peer-based programs was due to their desire to help their fellow students of color succeed. They wanted to help classmates acclimate to the college setting and provided them with resources to be successful at the university. They realized the importance of connecting with like-minded students to be successful. Due to their involvement they noticed an increase in the level of engagement with peers and faculty members outside of the classroom, which further influenced their persistence. The participants credited their involvement as a major reason why they were successful and had positive relationships with peers and faculty.

The participants of this study also realized involvement helped enhance certain skills, which were later used in the classroom. As a result of their active involvement, the participants noted they further developed time management and communication skills. Time management skills helped them meet deadlines for assignments, create a schedule to study, and organize and prepare for courses. Their communication skills not only helped them when they communicated and presented to the student body but when they were assigned presentations in class. As a result of their involvement, their skill building provided a sense of confidence and ease to speak with faculty members about personal and professional matters and special interests.

The participants in this study realized it was their involvement that afforded many opportunities such as internships, jobs, resume for career attainment, and increased their network of successful Black males. They understood that potential employers look for applicants who do more than just go to school and receive good grades; employers look for students who have the ability to balance schoolwork and involvement in the community. Students who could efficiently and effectively do both were the types of
candidates hired for internships and considered for future employment. The employers knew the importance of involvement because it helped the students to develop certain skill sets relevant to the position. During interviews the students were able to focus on these skills and connect their involvement experiences to the job responsibilities. They realized their involvement provided them with an advantage over other students. Their involvement also created an opportunity to connect to a greater network of other successful Black males. This network provided access to information, job opportunities, and scholarship opportunities.

**Students with a high level of self-discipline achieve greater academic results.**

The participants of this study all shared how the support they received from their families, peers, faculty, and staff played a significant role in their high level of self-discipline, which was a determining factor of their success. They understood how their self-discipline motivated them to enroll year-to-year and helped them transcend barriers, which typically undermine the achievement of Black males in college. They credited their self-discipline as an internal source of motivation that helped them be successful. They also recognized their self-discipline as a factor that differentiated themselves from others who were not as successful. They understood without their sense of self-discipline they would be in the same predicament as their family members or peers who made poor choices in life and did not attend college. For many, self-discipline was their only source of motivation to be successful.

**Intentional support and outreach to Black males increases their level of achievement.** The participants in the study believed their peers left the university prematurely because it was too expensive and because they were not academically...
prepared. The university attracts a majority of first-generation college students, which means this was the first experience a family has with learning how to pay for advanced education. Although the university provided generous financial aid packages, the participants also shared the need to teach Black males how to properly manage their financial aid packages in order to be aware of deadlines and requirements needed for compliance. The participants also suggested the university should provide more assistance with access to various scholarships that would further assist Black males in their determination to attain a college degree.

The participants believed there was a need to immediately connect Black males in high school to a college setting. Through this relationship the high school students would become better informed about the rigors of college and have the necessary tools to achieve academic success. Many of the study participants explained that they were not challenged nor adequately prepared for college. It was their tenacity and self-discipline that assisted them to be successful. They believed if access were provided to Black males in local high schools, they would be better prepared for when they attended. Creating opportunities for potential Black male students to engage with successful Black college students would provide a different perspective on access to a college education. This type of initiative would decrease the number of Black males who believed college was not for them and instead show them college was possible.

Comparison between Harper’s research and this study. Because this study was inspired by Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008) original research, it is important to discuss his findings in comparison to the dissertation study. Harper focused on the benefits of involvement, peer support, and the role racial identity played in their
engagement choices. The areas compared include sources of motivation, the gap between the institutions’ stated mission and reality, reasons for involvement, and opportunities afforded as a result of involvement. Additionally, the scope of the dissertation research went beyond Harper’s in that it investigated participant perceptions of specific teaching methods that best engaged them.

*Sources of motivation.* Harper’s (2003) study focused on identifying the sources of motivation to go college for his participants. When comparing the sources of motivation in both research studies, there were some similarities and one difference that emerged (Table 4.10).

Table 4.10

*Comparison of Research Findings: Sources of Motivation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harper’s Research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Motivation</td>
<td>Self-Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>Peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>Downfall of peers/family</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008) participants said their sources of motivation were their parents, self-motivation, their peers, and God. The participants in the dissertation shared similar sources of motivation but with one difference. While Harper’s participants stated God was a source of motivation, the students in the dissertation study stated the downfall of parents/peers was a motivating factor. Even though the participants of the dissertation study attended a religiously affiliated school, neither God or any kind of spiritual being was mentioned.
Gap between institutions’ stated mission and reality. In Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008) research all of the participants attended predominately White institutions where they represented a small population of successful Black males. Harper’s participants believed there was a gap between their schools’ stated commitment to diversity and reality. His participants said they had to deal with issues of racism and of not fitting into the institutions. Unlike the students in Harper’s research, the students in the dissertation study gravitated to St. John’s University because of its diversity, and they understood the need to be immersed in a diverse environment in order to learn from various perspectives. Because the university was located in a metropolitan city, it provided access to a multitude of races, ethnicities, and religious affiliations, and these characteristics were found to play a significant role in the academic success of the study participants.

Reasons for involvement. Like the participants in the dissertation study, the participants in Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008) study were all involved on campus, and the reasons they chose to be involved were similar to the reasons the students in the dissertation study got involved (Table 4.11).

Table 4.11

Comparison of Research Findings: Reasons for Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harper’s Research</th>
<th>This Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Older Peers</td>
<td>Older Peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Uplift</td>
<td>Community Uplift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispel Stereotypes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants in the dissertation study shared similar reasons for why they became involved while on campus. In Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008) study and in the dissertation study, the students discussed how older peers reached out to them and helped them become connected to the institution. The older peers understood the need to be involved on campus and thus helped them. Participants in both studies also became involved because they wanted to be a part of a group of like-minded peers who were focused on community uplift. They understood there was a need to reach out to the community in order to enact change. The difference between Harper’s participants and the participants in the dissertation research was that Harper’s participants became involved because they wanted to dispel common stereotypes associated with African-Americans. For the participants in the dissertation study racism was never a concern; as a result, dispelling common stereotypes did not emerge as a reason for involvement.

**Opportunities afforded as a result of involvement.** In both studies, the participants discussed the opportunities afforded because of their involvement (Table 4.12). For example, due to their involvement, participants were able to attain internship and job opportunities. The experiences they had provided sufficient skill sets needed for the internships and jobs. The basic proficiency developed by both groups was time management. This skill was described as critical to success both in and out-of-the classroom. In the dissertation research, the participants also credited the development of their communication skills to their involvement. They said they learned these skills in their respective clubs, organizations, and departmental programs and applied the skills to presentations and group projects in class.
Table 4.12

*Comparison of Research Findings: Opportunities Afforded*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harper’s Research</th>
<th>This Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internships and Job</td>
<td>Internships and Job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>Opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>Time Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Scope of the research.* The dissertation study extended Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008) research on involvement in order to develop an understanding of specific teaching methods best engaged Black males (Table 4.13).

Table 4.13

*Comparisons of Research Findings: Overall*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harper’s Research</th>
<th>This Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Motivation</td>
<td>Sources of Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement: Benefits/Reasons</td>
<td>Involvement: Benefits/Reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits/Reasons</td>
<td>Engaging Teaching Methods and Environments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data revealed the need for faculty to utilize a variety of teaching techniques that engage the students. Faculty who were able to connect what they were learning in the classroom to practical (real world) issues were the faculty who connected the best with the participants. The participants also discussed the importance of faculty being
approachable so as to develop relationships outside of the classroom. These relationships were integral to the students’ success, and the participants realized without that additional support, they would not have been as successful. The study participants also shared that faculty who were passionate about the subject and were academically rigorous created a learning environment that challenged and supported them as learners.

Summary. The Black male participants in the dissertation study were successful because they did not have to experience issues with discrimination and racism at the university. The diverse metropolitan environment provided them with an opportunity to feel welcomed and they never felt alienated because of the color of their skin. They had a network of family, faculty, and peer support, both on and off campus who continually challenged and supported them during the many academic and social experiences at the university. The study participants were academically successful because of the faculty members who utilized a variety of teaching techniques that engaged and inspired them during the learning process. These faculty members understood the importance of creating a learning environment that connected what they were learning in class to what they are experiencing in the real world.

The participants’ outside involvement in a myriad of social, academic, and community service related activities and organizations assisted them in developing stronger relationships with their peers and faculty. These activities also enhanced their basic proficiencies, which they found to be beneficial in the classroom environment. Many of the participants realized it was their self-discipline that helped them to be academically successful. Their belief in their own capabilities influenced them to stay motivated and focused on attaining a college degree. They realized if their peers who left
the university had more access to information and support, those peer would still be enrolled. Thus, intentional outreach to the target population is critical to their longevity on a college campus. Finally, the findings indicated that communicating the various resources to help Black males succeed early and often is essential to creating knowledgeable and successful students.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings from the dissertation study in greater detail and to provide insight in relation to professional practice. The findings create an opportunity to provide suggestions to predominately White institutions regarding the successful enrollment, retention, and persistence of Black males towards graduation. Within the findings, recommendations for policy and practice are offered for parents of Black males, faculty, staff, peers, and university officials. The chapter also includes the limitations of this study, which may have affected the results. The discussion of the limitations is followed by recommendations for future research, which are based on further understanding the experiences of how successful students from various demographic populations successfully enroll, retain, and persist towards graduation.

The objective of the study was to gain insight into the learning environment both in and outside of the classroom, which best engages, retains, and helps Black college males to persist towards gradation. This study gathered information from the experiences of the participants about the teaching methods and environment, the sources of motivation, the types of activities they participate in, and the transferable skills they develop and use in the classroom. The overall objectives of this study have been achieved and are consistent with the literature presented in Chapter 2. This study provides colleges and universities with pertinent information regarding the learning
environments Black males need to successfully enroll, retain, and persist towards graduation. Their experiences provide an understanding for what college and universities should do to positively impact Black male graduation rates.

The literature on Black males in a college setting frequently presents data from a deficit approach and lists the many reasons why Black males do not succeed (Aud et al., 2010, Ellis, 2009, Harper, 2003, Palmer et al., 2011). The dissertation study used an anti-deficit approach to examine the perceptions of the experiences realized by Black males who, in spite the odds, manage to succeed at a predominately White urban institution. The perceptions were gathered through in-depth interviews from 16 Black men attending St. John’s University who met and exceeded academic expectations and successfully persisted toward graduation. These experiences were analyzed through the theoretical lens of Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement perspective, Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory, and Astin’s (1984) involvement theory.

**Implications of the Findings**

This section is the culmination of the four theoretical frameworks used to guide the study, the literature that supports the study, and the data analysis presented in Chapter 4. There are six implications: (a) examine the realities of students with no family or community support, (b) examine the current demographics of faculty members and the potential impact of the lack of Black faculty on Black male success, (c) examine the current silo model in which student affairs and academic affairs often operate in order to create a seamless transition between learning and development, (d) investigate current practices and policies that may impede Black male success, (e) maximize the investment
in Black alumni and other support groups to enhance self-efficacy, academic achievement, and success, and (f) examine the high school to college pipeline to successfully connect future students. These implications provide college and universities with insights into how to address the needs of African American males striving to enroll in and persist toward graduation from college.

Examine the realities of students with no family or community support.

Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory posits the need for support and motivation in order to change outcome behavior. Similar to the participants in Harper (2003, 2012), Griffin (2006), and Palmer et al.’s (2011) research studies, family support was the most significant source of motivation. Many of the participants shared how their family members motivated them to go to college and earn a degree. They engrained the concept of attending college from the very beginning. For many of the parents, college was not viewed as an option but more of an expectation. Even though some of their family members did not attend college, the participants also credited them as effective motivators and supporters.

Unfortunately for many Black males, the reality is there is a lack of support in the household, which hinders overall success. The importance of understanding this situation is critical to the concerns around the college retention and graduation rates of Black males. University officials should be aware of this phenomenon and decide what they can do beyond the scope of their day-to-day responsibilities to provide more support and guidance for Black males. It is necessary to engage Black males in conversations about their personal and professional goals, as well as general conversations around specific interests. As the participants explained, they enjoyed interacting with faculty members.
who were engaging and caring. They sought supportive relationships on campus and to their advantage, they were successful. Unfortunately, not every Black male will have the courage to approach faculty and administrators because they are regarded as authority figures. There are many Black males who do not succeed in college. It is important to understand whether the lack of family or community support is a contributing factor in order to provide the necessary support needed for success.

Examine the current demographics of faculty members and the potential impact of the lack of Black faculty on Black male success. Traditionally many predominately White colleges and universities do not attract a high number of Black faculty members to their campuses. Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008) research spoke about the importance of peer support and especially how same race peer support is critical for college success. The participants of Harper’s work and the dissertation study realized the importance of interacting with like-minded peers who share cultural relevancy. This assists with social integration and enhances the development of Black identity.

Support for Black males goes beyond peers to include faculty members. The deficit of Black faculty members may impact the overall motivation of Black students because those students do not have someone who looks like them as examples of success. In addition to same race peers, an increased number of Black faculty members were present at predominately White institutions, more Black males might be encouraged to be successful. For Black males who leave higher education because of a lack support at home or in their community, a Black faculty member may be the only factor that changes that outcome. As Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory posits, learning is inextricably
linked to culture. The participants of the dissertation study argued for more interactive and engaging faculty with the ability to connect what is being taught inside the classroom with day-to-day experiences. With an increased number of Black faculty members connecting cultural experiences to the learning process, more Black males may be offered an opportunity to enhance and increase academic achievement.

Examine the current silo model in which Student Affairs and Academic Affairs often operate in order to create a seamless transition between learning and development. The research participants in Bonaparte’s (2009) study disclosed that they learned best when faculty used a variety of techniques such as collaborative learning. Similarly, the participants in this study explained how faculty members who use a variety of techniques such as collaborative learning, connecting lessons to real-world practice, and actively engaging their students in the classroom were most beneficial to their success. They also explained how their involvement outside of the classroom further enhanced basic proficiencies. Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework and Astin’s (1993) Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) illustrate the importance of an alliance between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. Thus this dissertation research calls for university faculty and administrators to examine how they can work together in order to maximize student learning. The current silo models between the two areas that interact with a student on a daily basis need to be examined. There is a need for a multi-pronged approach with a shared philosophy in student learning and achievement in order to impact change for Black male success. The participants in this study valued their experiences at the university when they were able to use the skills they learned through various forms of involvement back into
the classroom. This synergy of learning increases satisfaction, achievement, and retention rates as Turner’s (2007) work showed.

**Investigate current practices and policies that may have impeded Black male success.** Astin’s (1984) involvement theory discussed the importance of students devoting their time and energy to participating in campus facilities and resources as a predictor of retention. With this theory in mind, colleges and universities can focus on the specific resources for Black males that support their success. The participants of the dissertation study believed their peers leave the university because of financial concerns, not being academically prepared, or a lack of self-discipline. They also believed the university can do a better job to improve the communication of resources to Black males. Unlike the participants in Harper’s (2012) research, these students have major concerns with the financial burden of a college career. Thus, colleges and universities need to analyze all current resources they provide that specifically benefits Black male retention and graduation rates. Examining the current landscape of the organization helps identify the current strengths of services and the potential gaps in services for Black males. This process creates an opportunity for all university officials to examine policies and practices for any potential obstacles that impede Black male success.

**Maximize the investment in Black alumni and other support groups to enhance self-efficacy, academic achievement, and success.** According to Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory, a person’s belief about their capabilities influences their behaviors, which produces outcomes, which self-fulfill their beliefs. Guiffrida’s (2003) research explained the need for Black males to be a part of a group of other Black students in order to promote social integration. Similarly, the participants in the
dissertation study valued being a part of group of like-minded peers because it provided support, accountability, and access to opportunities. Beyond the college environment, support can manifest through interactions with Black alumni. Successful Black alumni can provide mentorship and support as well as career development and exploration through internship and potential job opportunities. Linking Black college males to successful Black alumni creates an alliance between what the students are experiencing while in college with what they can experience once they attain a college degree. This relationship creates a new hope and understanding about successfully completing college. Surrounding Black college males with successful Black alumni will make them want to achieve. Along with Black alumni, other support groups with successful Black males who reach out and support their community are organizations like the 100 Black Men of America. The core of 100 Black Men of America is service to the community in order to make a difference. Through interactions with these groups of influential men, Black males will gain the support and confidence to be successful while in college.

**Examine the high school to college pipeline to successfully connect future students.** Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework, as well as Astin’s (1993) Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model indicates that what a college student experiences prior to attending college is significant to the overall academic success of that student. Colleges and universities concerned with the enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of Black males need to examine the root cause of the decline in high school graduation rates for Black males in order to impact change. It is clear more work needs to be done in the high schools in order to increase the graduation rates of Black males. In this study, 63% of the participants described a good to great academic
experience in high school, while the others did not. However, 94% of them knew that college was the next step in life even though a few of them had a bad high school experience. Nonetheless, the participants understood the value of discipline needed to be successful. However, many Black males in high school do not have the same level of discipline, so it becomes harder for them to fathom the concept of a college education if they can barely graduate from high school. An examination of this pipeline to college is critical to the longevity of Black males successfully enrolling, retaining, and graduating from college. If Black males are not graduating from high school and entering college, there will always be a deficit in representation.

Limitations

The dissertation study gathered information from the experiences of successful Black males to understand what helps them to enroll, retain, and persist towards graduation. Colleges and universities can use the findings to inform policy changes and practices to better support Black males attending predominately White institutions. Although this study adds to the limited research on Black males from an anti-deficit perspective, there are a few limitations that may have affected the findings.

The first limitation of this study is the use of a 3.0 grade point average as the standard of success. Each participant had a different major and came from different colleges at the university, which suggests a difference in academic rigor, sliding grade scales, and the student’s motivation because of those factors. Similar to Harper’s (2003) research, the 3.0 grade point average is a limitation because it denies the opportunity of including students who have lower than a 3.0 grade point average but who remain
successfully connected to the institution to voice their experiences of how they persist through college.

A second limitation of this study is the research methodology. This study was interested in understanding the lived experiences of successful Black males at a predominately White urban university in the Northeast. Qualitative research designs provide detailed descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants rather than survey completion and analyzing statistical data found in quantitative research studies (Creswell, 2007). However, a qualitative research design often is regarded as not being generalizable because it is based on the lived experiences of the participants in local conditions, which may not be replicable in other settings. Therefore, the findings of the dissertation study should not be generalized to all Black males attending colleges; however, the findings do provide additional insights into the nature of the phenomenon.

The third limitation of the dissertation study is not having information on the students who did not retain and graduate due to the lack of family support. There is no comparative data (either through interviews or archival data) on students who do graduate and those who do not. Since family support played a major role in the lives of the participants of this study, understanding whether the lack of family support had a significant impact on the ones who did not persist could provide more insight on this factor as a source of motivation. The fourth limitation of this study is that although triangulation was attempted it did show positive results; there was only one factor of the study that triangulated.
Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the implications of the study and informed professional practice and decision-making. These recommendations offer colleges and universities insight on what is needed in order to increase Black male enrollment, retention, and graduation rates.

Faculty/student connections. Faculty and staff need to develop stronger relationships beyond their typical responsibilities. They need to make it a priority to outreach to Black males and inquire about their day-to-day experiences. As the research shows, Black males need support in order to be successful. They traditionally connect to faculty who are caring and concerned about their overall well-being. For those who leave the university, if they have faculty and staff who are connected to them, they could potentially assist with those concerns that cause them to leave. The participants of this study believed if their peers knew who to talk to, then they probably would still be matriculated at the university. Connecting Black males to concerned and dedicated faculty and staff for continued support is crucial to their existence in predominately White institutions.

Recruit Black faculty. The presence of Black faculty members at predominately White colleges and universities is traditionally low. If the retention of Black males is important to an institution, the recruitment of Black faculty should be as important. Black males need examples of successful people who look like them so they can aspire to be successful. Similar to connecting Black males in high schools with successful Black college students, it is important for Black male college students to connect with adults who look like them. Connecting with faculty and staff of the same race who understand
their struggles as Black males is favorable for everyone. Colleges and universities need to examine the data on what the faculty population looks like in comparison to the population they serve. Creating more access and opportunities for Black faculty members may impact the overall retention and graduation rates of Black males.

**Make retention of Black males a university-wide initiative.** All colleges and universities should realize the importance a shared responsibility on learning and development. Learning on a college campus is a multi-pronged approach where all constituents who interact with the students on a day-to-day basis are seamlessly integrated. If the retention of Black males becomes a university wide initiative, the impact will be greater than if the task being is assigned to one area or office. All entities within the university should collaborate on policies and practices that encourage Black male success in order to impact institutional change.

**Establish a resource center to address isolation.** Many Black males who attend predominately White institutions often feel isolated or alone. This feeling is then compounded with the lack of knowledge on how to successfully navigate the college pipeline. The participants of this study explained how they did not know about certain resources available to them as students until they matriculated to their second or third year. They also believed if the university communicates these resources to Black males, then it would be mutually beneficial. Establishing a resource center for Black students would create a one-stop-shop venue where students could inquire about academic advising, financial aid, scholarships and grants, activities and programs, and mentoring programs. This venue would provide students with all of the necessary information and programs to ensure their academic success.
Make connections possible. Connecting Black males to successful Black alumni will further enhance their network of support. As the participants of this study recognized, their access to alumni provided many internship and job opportunities. For Black males who attend predominately White colleges and universities, this opportunity creates access to a group of like-minded individuals who are successful in their fields. The shared experience in college and the need to support one another creates more opportunities for Black males to be successful after they graduate.

Create connections between high school and college students. The number of Black males who successfully transition from high school to college is grim. Predominately White colleges and universities concerned with the enrollment and graduation rates of Black males need to realize it starts in high school. Creating more opportunities for Black males in high school to connect with successful Black males in college provides access to something that is often regarded as unattainable. This can also be manifested through the development of a high school to college preparatory program. This program can develop the skills and aptitude necessary for the rigors of a college environment. The participant’s shared that many of their peers were not academically prepared for college and that was one of the reasons they believe they left the university. With more programs that intentionally reach out to Black males in high school and provide them with the proper skills and proficiencies needed to be successful, the number of Black males entering and prematurely leaving may decrease.

Duplicate the research with Latino/as. Research has shown that the Latino population is a growing minority group at colleges and universities (Aud et al., 2010). Latino students present a new concern because colleges and universities need to develop
support programs that will benefit their specific needs. It would be worthwhile to
duplicate this research with Latino males to develop an understanding of whether they
have the same experiences and motivations as Black males. Such an investigation would
to add to the research from an anti-deficit achievement perspective but with a different
population. To add a different viewpoint, Latino females could also participate to
examine whether there are any differences between the male and female experience.

**Conclusion**

The achievement gap among minorities in higher education continues to be a
major concern (Rovai et al., 2005). Poor high school graduation rates, low enrollment,
retention, and graduation rates continue to be the main reasons why the achievement gap
persists (Aud et al., 2010, Ellis, 2009, Harper 2006a, Palmer et al., 2011). The Schott
Foundation for Public Education (2012) stated though high school graduation rates have
increased for Black males, it will take approximately 50 years to catch up to their White
male counterparts. The National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES) comparative
report between 1980 and 2008 showed an increase of Black students enrolling in college,
but this is largely attributed to an increase of Black females (Aud et al., 2010). Between
1976 and 2002, the gap worsened where enrollment increased by 126% for Black females
compared to only 51% for Black males (Harper, 2006a). We are in a state of emergency
when it comes to the enrollment, retention, and graduation of Black males. Nationally,
more than 68% of Black men who attend college do not graduate within six years, which
is the lowest college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in
higher education (Harper, 2006a).
In spite of the evidence, which shows a dismal trend in the enrollment, retention, and persistence towards graduation of Black males in college, there is still a small percentage that transcends the odds and graduate on time from four-year institutions. This phenomenological study examined the perceptions of Black men enrolled at St. John’s University to gain insight on their experiences with enrolling, retaining, and persisting towards graduation. Findings provide insight on the learning environments and type of support needed for academic success. The theoretical frameworks which guided this study were Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework, Vygotky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory, and Astin’s (1984) involvement theory. All four theories helped to determine the factors that supported the participants of this study in their efforts to successfully enroll, retain, and persist toward graduation.

Harper’s (2012) anti-deficit achievement model provides a balanced understanding of the lives of Black men in colleges and universities who persist successfully. His model frames how the pre-college experiences, along with involvement both academically and socially, impact student engagement and retention at a university (Astin, 1985a, Palmer & Young, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory posits learning is inextricably tied to the cultural experiences of the learner. His three-pronged approach suggests a need for social interaction with other people to share ideas and learn through a global understanding of the information. The learner realizes their limitations and uses collaborative learning to better understand the concept and the need for support and encouragement of others to complete the task. Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory emphasizes how teaching and learning are highly
social activities and those interactions with parents, teachers, peers, and instructional materials influence the cognitive and affective development of learners. The theory posits students will succeed if they receive positive reinforcement in their environment and have a positive sense of self and ability to accomplish a task (Bandura, 1997). Astin’s (1984) involvement theory provides an understanding of how involvement in educationally purposeful activities and clubs enhances the learning occurring inside the classroom. Astin’s (1984) theory and model identify the salient points of what matters in college. Astin’s theory promotes involvement as a means of connecting to the institution, building skills, and greatly impacting retention and graduation rates.

This study, which is grounded in Harper’s (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012) research, set out to gain insight on how, in spite of the odds, a small percentage of Black males have been successful at a predominately White urban university. This study used the anti-deficit approach because of the need for more research that presents a positive view on Black males succeeding in college (Harper, 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012). Harper’s original research focused on the student’s perception of opportunities they believe are afforded to them due to their involvement in on-campus experiences, and he used the data from the same participants to explore same-race peer support groups, the role racial identity plays in the engagement in organizations, what the students gain from their involvement on campus, and how the relationships are negotiated at six predominately White institutions (2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008). Harper (2012) expanded his work with the largest-known empirical investigation of Black males in a variety of college and university settings, and this work led to the anti-deficit achievement model on which the dissertation study was designed. The dissertation study is an effort to gain an
understanding of how the Black males from St. John’s University successfully enroll, retain, and persist towards graduation. The dissertation study added to the body of research by adding information from the experiences of the participants about the teaching methods and environments that are more impactful to their learning, the specific motivations that help them to maintain enrollment, the types of activities they participate in, the transferable skills they develop and use in the classroom, and their suggestions on what the university can do to assist more Black males succeed in college.

The research questions guiding this study are (a) what type of in-class teaching methods and environments had a significant impact on the learning of Black college males, (b) what are the specific non-cognitive factors which had a significant impact on Black college males, (c) what types of educationally purposeful activities/clubs enhance the in-class learning for Black college males, and (d) what are some of the barriers that impede accomplishing persistence and graduation and to what degree can they be addressed through policy and practices invoked by university administrators? These questions provided a framework for the participants to describe their experiences, and the findings add to the growing research from an anti-deficit achievement approach.

Through qualitative research, perceptions were gathered through in-depth interviews from 13 Black men and a focus group of three Black men who are meeting and exceeding academic expectations and who will graduate on time. The best way to understand the lived experiences of these Black males was through phenomenological research, an interpretive process in which the researcher listens to the lived experiences of the participants and then makes meaning of the lived experience (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenological research requires the researcher to understand the participant’s
worldview while prior beliefs of a phenomenon are temporarily set aside in order to appreciate the elements of the experiences (Merriam, 1998). This process supported the exploration of the underlying reasons why these Black males are succeeding in college. Open-ended questions assisted in drawing out the salient points of their experiences and resulted in the identification of common themes, patterns, or variables (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006).

The literature on the state of Black men in college calls for more research to better understand how to increase the enrollment, retention, persistence, and graduation rates for Black men and other underrepresented groups (Fries-Bitt, 1997; Harper 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2009, 2012; Person & LeNoir, 1997). The extant literature separately focuses on in-class pedagogical practices, self-efficacy, and student involvement as learning constructs linked to academic success (Bonaparte, 2009; Bowie, 2006; Griffin, 2006; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2009, 2012; Harris, 2007; Johnson, 2007; Lee, 2009; Palmer et al, 2011; Turner, 2007). The dissertation research brought together the learning constructs, which are inextricably tied to the educational process of a Black male’s college experience (Yohannes-Reda, 2010). The seven themes that emerged from the data are (a) characteristics of the university, (b) caring and engaging faculty, (c) innovative teaching methods, (d) motivations for success, (e) personal development and community support, (f) reasons for departure, and (g) support services needed for success. The literature in Chapter 2 supports all seven themes and creates an opportunity for further discussion on how to support Black males in college.

Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory asserts learning is connected to the cultural experiences of the learner. The literature on in-class pedagogical practices state
Black males learn best when faculty use a variety of teaching techniques, incorporate collaborative learning opportunities, and link learning to real world experiences (Bonaparte, 2009; Lee, 2009; Turner, 2007). Through these techniques Black males are able to connect theory to practice, which further supports Vygotsky’s claim. The data from the participants supports these assertions because they believe they were most successful in a collaborative learning environment where the faculty member provides real world learning opportunities, actively engages them, and offers experiential learning opportunities. They all agreed these three elements assisted them to better comprehend the material. They suggested more faculty members should incorporate a variety of techniques in class to better engage and retain Black males.

Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory links to a highly social environment where there is a network of support, which enhances students’ ability to succeed. The literature suggests Black males need to create a network of support in order to influence their success in college (Griffin, 2006; Harper 2003, 2012; Harris, 2007; Palmer et al., 2011). The participants all agreed they are successful now because their family members encourage college as the next step in life. They explained how family members view college as an obligation and not an option. The participants were also able to connect with approachable faculty members concerned for their well-being and dedicated to their success. They explained how these faculty members consistently engaged them in conversations about personal, professional, and course-related materials. The participants also realized how critical a strong network of peers is in connecting them to opportunities both on and off campus. These support systems further enhance their self-efficacy, which impacts their self-discipline to focus on school and their personal success.
Astin’s (1984) involvement theory explains the environmental pressures contributing to the development of a college student. Involvement in educationally purposeful programs increases a student’s academic potential in school and connects them to the school, which positively influences retention and persistence (Astin 1984; Bowie, 2006; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper, 2003; Johnson, 2007). Through involvement, students build skills in decision-making, time management, working with diverse populations, and teamwork, which are all transferable to the classroom setting (Harper, 2005). Beyond skill building, Black male involvement is linked to prior experiences in high school and their need to connect with like minded peers, giving back to their community, and supporting each other (Harper, 2003, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2012; Johnson, 2007). The data from the dissertation study supports this assertion because all of the participants agreed their involvement was based on the reasons presented in the research. They strongly believed in serving impoverished communities to provide access and information to the youth to motivate them to go to college.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered to achieve change and enhance the learning environment for Black males in college. Colleges and universities need to worker harder at increasing their diversity profile. The participants explained how the diverse environment contributed to their success because they never felt as if they were an outsider. Creating a more diverse environment at predominately White institutions will enhance the overall experience of Black males enrolling at the institution and successfully graduating. There is a need for creating a network of support for Black males. It is important to create a more supportive environment for Black males at predominately White institutions so they can succeed.
Parents, faculty, administrators, staff, and peers all play a role in supporting Back males from the onset. Creating and implementing support groups for Black males in college will positively influence them and greatly impact their college experience. Parents need to be connected to the university and have access to information so they can continue to support their students and be knowledgeable of the academic culture at the university.

Faculty should do a better job at creating a more engaging learning environment in the classroom. Using of a variety of engaging techniques such as collaborative learning, experiential learning opportunities, and linking lessons to real-world practice will create a more interactive learning environment, which will encourage academic excellence (Bonaparte, 2009; Lee, 2009; Turner, 2007). Encouraging Black males to participate in programs and activities with other successful Black students is beneficial to their development and success. Purposefully connecting them to these types of activities will benefit both the student and the university (Astin 1984; Bowie, 2006; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper, 2003; Johnson, 2007). Being involved on campus impacts Black male retention and affords them many opportunities such as internships, jobs, and a network of successful Black students. It should be a priority of colleges and universities to connect Black males to purposeful engagement opportunities so they can connect with like-minded peers and be retained at the university. Through these activities, Black males will develop skills that can be used both in and out-of-the classroom environment. This will create a synergy between what they are learning through active involvement with what they are doing inside the classroom.

A person’s belief about their capabilities influences their future behaviors and therefore produces outcomes, which self-fulfill their beliefs. A person’s high sense of
self-efficacy dictates how high they set their goals and how firmly they commit to those goals (Bandura, 1997). Working with Black males to increase their sense of self-efficacy will impact their self-discipline and therefore enhance their overall college experience. The need more research on self-discipline is imperative so that colleges and universities can develop ways to impact the overall academic experience of the Black male student. The findings show there is a need for more support services for Black males to achieve. There also is a need to better prepare the students before they encounter the academic rigor of a college classroom. Mandated participation in a summer bridge program for those students who are not academically prepared will provide a foundation for the demands of a college setting. Through these types of programs the students will learn how to manage assignments, build relationships with faculty and staff, and be better prepared for the academic year.

There should also be a focus on alternatives to pay for college through outside scholarships and to assist Black males in becoming well versed in the financial aid process and knowledgeable about forms, deadlines, and processes. With these additional support services, Black males will become more aware of the processes, which will therefore impact the retention and graduation rates. College and universities need to create access for Black males in local high schools to provide a stronger connection to positive role models and access to a college setting. This will help motivate Black males in high school aspire to go to college and see it as the next step in life rather than and viewing a college education as unattainable.

The first limitation of the study is the 3.0 grade point average set as the threshold for participants. Each college and major in the university differs in expectations, so a 3.0
grade point average in one school may not be comparable to one in another college because of different grading systems, academic rigor, and students’ motivation. The second limitation is the research methodology used for this study. Qualitative research provides insight into the lived experiences of the participants in local conditions. Therefore the findings of the study should not be generalized to all Black males attending college. The third limitation is the lack of information on the Black males who left the university and whether the scarcity of family support is a determining factor. The fourth limitation of this study is that while triangulation was attempted, it did not show convergence of results. There was only one factor of the study that triangulated.

The recommendations evolve from the implications of this research study. Faculty and staff need to develop stronger relationships beyond their daily responsibilities. Many Black males who come to college may not have the support from their family or community. It is imperative for faculty and staff to reach out to Black males and create personalized relationships. This will increase their overall support at the university and may impact retention and graduation rates. Black males need to have more examples of like-minded people who look like them. Investing the time and energy to increase the number of Black faculty on campus will provide Black males with more examples of successful people who can relate to their experiences.

Student Affairs and Academic Affairs share the responsibility of the learning and development of a college student. If the two areas that have this shared responsibility do not collaborate, students will have a disjointed experience. Colleges and universities need to institute stronger collaboration and adopt a multi-pronged approach to learning. In order to enhance support for Black males, the university should commit to the creation
of a one-stop-shop resource center dedicated to their success. This center would bring together resources such as academic advising, financial aid, mentoring programs, and activities that will benefit the student. Connecting Black males to successful Black alumni will create opportunities for support and access to internships and job opportunities. These alumni also will serve as role models for what Black males can achieve after they graduate. The final recommendation is to strengthen the high school to college pipeline. This can be achieved through purposeful connections to successful Black college males as examples of what is possible and attainable. Having someone students could look up to and who can act as mentors will create possibilities for something often regarded as unattainable.

Recommendations for future research are based on the need to further understand the experiences of how successful students from various demographic populations successfully enroll, retain, and persist towards graduation. The experiences of Latino males and females can be researched to gain a better understanding of their experiences as one of the largest minority populations entering colleges and universities. The findings could offer insight on what Latinos and Latinas believe motivates them to be successful so the information can be used to assist others who are not as successful.

There is an abundance of literature that speaks to the reasons why Black males do not succeed in college. But for those who are successful, it is imperative to understand their experiences in order to enact change for those who are not successful. Experiences of success can help alter the landscape for Black male success at all colleges and universities. It will take all constituents involved in the learning and development process of the student to be collectively invested in their achievement in order for the
enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of Black males to increase. This is a challenge for all to consider and act on so we can finally move the needle in a positive direction for our young Black males across the nation.
References


Harris (2007). *The influence mentoring has on the persistence of academically successful African American males who are juniors or seniors at a public, predominantly


Appendix A

Harper’s Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework

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<tr>
<th>PRE-COLLEGE SOCIALIZATION</th>
<th>COLLEGE ACHIEVEMENT</th>
<th>POST-COLLEGE SUCCESS</th>
<th>EMPLOYMENT POST-GRADUATION</th>
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<td><strong>FAMILIAL FACTORS</strong></td>
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<td>How do family members nurture and sustain Black male students’ interest in school?</td>
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<td>How do parents help shape Black men’s college aspirations?</td>
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<td><strong>K-12 SCHOOL FORCES</strong></td>
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<td>What do teachers and other school agents do to assist Black men in getting to college?</td>
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<td>How do Black male students negotiate academic achievement alongside peer acceptance?</td>
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<td><strong>OUT-OF-SCHOOL COLLEGE PREP RESOURCE</strong></td>
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<td>How do low-income and first generation Black male students acquire knowledge about college?</td>
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<td>Which programs and experiences enhance Black men’s college readiness?</td>
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<td><strong>OUT-OF-CLASS ENGAGEMENT</strong></td>
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<td>What compels Black men to take advantage of campus resources and engagement opportunities?</td>
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<td>What unique educational benefits and outcomes are conferred to Black male student leaders?</td>
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<td>How do achievers foster mutually supportive relationships with their lower-performing same-race male peers?</td>
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<td><strong>ENRICHING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES</strong></td>
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<td>What developmental gains do Black male students attribute to studying abroad?</td>
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<td>How do Black men cultivate value-added relationships with faculty and administrators?</td>
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<td>What do Black male students find appealing about doing research with professors?</td>
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<td><strong>CAREER READINESS</strong></td>
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<td>Which college experiences enable Black men to compete successfully for careers in their fields?</td>
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<td>What prepares Black male achievers for racial politics they will encounter in post-college workplace settings?</td>
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<td>How do faculty and other institutional agents enhance Black men’s career development and readiness?</td>
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**CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES**
- What compels one to speak and participate actively in courses in which he is the only Black student?
- How do undergraduate men earn GPAs above 3.0 in majors for which they were academically unprepared?
- How do Black undergraduate men construct productive responses to stereotypes encountered in classrooms?

**GRADUATE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT**
- What happened in college to develop and support Black male students’ interest in pursuing degrees beyond the bachelor’s?
- How do Black undergraduate men who experience racism at predominantly white universities maintain their commitment to pursuing graduate and professional degrees at similar types of institutions?

**CAREER CHOICE-POST GRADUATION**
- Did you work while in college?
- To what extent did your undergraduate experience prepare you for your first job?
- In what ways were your career goals influenced by your early work experience?

**OUT-OF-CLASS ENGAGEMENT**
- What compels Black men to take advantage of campus resources and engagement opportunities?
- What unique educational benefits and outcomes are conferred to Black male student leaders?
- How do achievers foster mutually supportive relationships with their lower-performing same-race male peers?

**ENRICHING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES**
- What developmental gains do Black male students attribute to studying abroad?
- How do Black men cultivate value-added relationships with faculty and administrators?
- What do Black male students find appealing about doing research with professors?

**CAREER READINESS**
- Which college experiences enable Black men to compete successfully for careers in their fields?
- What prepares Black male achievers for racial politics they will encounter in post-college workplace settings?
- How do faculty and other institutional agents enhance Black men’s career development and readiness?
Appendix B

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

Study Title: Examining Perceptions of Successful Black College Males: An Analysis of Their Experiences with Successfully Enrolling, Retaining, and Persisting Towards Graduation At a Predominately White Urban University.

Dear _____,

My name is James Salnave and I serve as the Associate Dean for Student Development in the Division of Student Affairs at St. John’s University and a doctoral student in the Ed.D program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree and I would like to invite you to participate. I am interested in interviewing you in particular because you represent a small percentage of successful Black males with a high grade point average who is on track to graduate on time. Your insight into this phenomenon is crucial because you can provide some pertinent information that can assist other Black males to succeed at the university. I am interested in studying the learning environment both in and outside of the classroom which best engages, retains, and graduates Black males at St. John’s. Your participation will be of value to university administrators and faculty who are interested in improving the quality of educational services for all students and in particular Black males. If you decide to participate, you will meet with me to discuss your successful transition through the college pipeline.
The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last about 60-90 minutes depending on what you are willing to share. For just an hour of your time, you will receive a $10 Chase gift card for participating. Please be advised that the interview will be audio taped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. All audio recordings will then be destroyed once the information is transcribed. Participation in this study is anonymous, which means that no one will know your answers.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering. Participation, non-participation, or withdrawal will not affect your grades in any way. I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at (718) 990-2708 or js04413@sjfc.edu if you have study related questions or problems. Please be advised that this study has been reviewed by the St. John Fisher College Internal Review Board (IRB) and if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or general questions about the study, you may contact my chair Dr. Claudia Edwards at (914) 654-5253. Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please contact me at the number listed below to discuss participation.

With kind regards,

(718) 990-2708 (office)
(516) 984-1006 (cell)
Js04413@sjfc.edu
Appendix C

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN INTERVIEW RESEARCH

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by James Salnave who is a candidate for a doctorate from the Ed.D Executive Leadership Program from the Graduate School of Education at St. John Fisher College, New Rochelle extension site. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the experiences of successful African-American college males attending a predominately-White institution. I will be one of approximately 10-15 students being interviewed for this research.

My participation in this project is voluntary. For completing the interview process, I understand that I will be awarded a $10 Chase gift card as gift. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.

I understand if I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview. All interviews will take place in a mutually agreed upon location that is non-threatening. If I choose to have someone accompany to the interview, I understand there will be a designated location for my guest during my interview.
1. The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes (depending on my input). Notes will be written during the interview. I understand that the researcher will be recording my interview with and that all recording will be destroyed after 5 years.

2. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies, which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

3. Faculty and administrators from my campus will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

4. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Behavioral Sciences Committee at St. John Fisher College. If I have any questions about my rights as a research participant or general questions about the study, you may contact the Committee Chair, Dr. Claudia Edwards at [redacted]. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

5. I understand that by participating in this research study, that I will contribute to the literature on successful Black males in college and provide more insight to faculty and university administrators at all institutions about the best ways to engage Black males both in and out of the college classroom. Results of this study will provide a platform for Student Affairs and Academic Affairs to develop policies and procedures to better assist those whom are not as successful.

____________________________                           ________________________
My Signature             Date

____________________________                          _____________________________
My Printed Name          Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact: James Salnave - 718-990-2708
Appendix D

SAMPLE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Overall Experience

1. Please share with me your academic journey and how you arrived to St. John’s University?
   • Tell me about your high school academic and social experiences?
   • What type of pre-college programs did you participate before arriving, if any?
   • Please explain why you decided to attend college?
   • Why specifically St. John’s University?
   • How has being a Black male impacted your experience at St. John’s University?
   • Finally, what do you think the university can do to foster a greater sense of belonging to improve the rates of academic success among Black male students?

Research Question #1: What type of in-class teaching methods and environments had a significant impact on the learning of Black college males?

2. Please share with me your academic experience at St. John’s University?
   • What has been your greatest success academically at the university?
   • Tell me about your favorite faculty member and why they are your favorite?
   • Can you please describe the teaching strategies they implemented in class that has helped you to learn?
   • Why do you like those strategies?
   • Tell me about the teaching strategies you dislike. Why do you dislike those strategies?

Research Question #2: What are the specific non-cognitive factors that had a significant impact on Black college males?
3. Please describe to me the personal or social beliefs, motivations, strengths, and attitudes, which had a significant impact on your college career thus far?
   - Who has played a significant role in your ability to be academically successful?
     - What did they do/say specifically?
   - What motivates you to stay enrolled from year-to-year?
   - How do you manage to transcend environmental, social, cultural, economic, and academic barriers, which typically undermine achievement for Black males in college?
   - What factors are different for you when you compare yourself to others who are not as successful?
   - What are your future goals in life?
   - How much education do you expect to get during your lifetime?

**Research Question #3:** What types of educationally purposeful activities/clubs enhance the in-class learning for Black college males?

4. Please tell me about your level of involvement either on or off campus.
   - If involved either on or off campus: Why did you choose to get involved in those specific programs/activities? How
   - If not involved: Why did you choose not to get involved? Do you think this has affected you academically?
   - What opportunities either on or off campus have been afforded to you because of your active involvement? *(Only ask if involved)*
   - What skills have you learned as a part of your involvement that has enhanced your in-class learning? Please describe those transferable skills. *(Only ask if involved)*
   - What do you believe the university can do to better enhance the integration between involvement and in-class learning?

**Research Question #4:** What are some of the barriers that impede accomplishing persistence and graduation and to what degree can they be addressed through policy and practices invoked by university administrators?

5. Please describe the overall climate for Black males at St. John’s University?
   - What factors have kept you enrolled in this institution?
   - What are some of the reasons why your Black male colleagues have left the university?
   - What kind of support do you believe the university should provide in order to better assist Black males?
• What information would you share with other Black males entering this university to help them overcome barriers and achieve academically?
• Fill in the blank: In order to succeed you should______________.
# Appendix E

## Overview Of Themes, Sub-Themes, And Partial Supportive Quotes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub Themes</th>
<th>Supporting Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the University</td>
<td>Location (NYC)</td>
<td>“Specifically I liked the fact it was in New York City…the fact that it’s in the global market of New York City…I think that’s very important.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metro Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse Campus Population</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;...a college that was being extremely diverse, I knew there was a lot of different people from all over the country, all over the world coming here, so it would be a chance to engage with people from different backgrounds…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generous Financial-Aid Package</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I applied to St. John’s and they gave me the best financial aid package.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Sub Themes</td>
<td>Supporting Quotes</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring and Engaging</td>
<td>Academic Rigor</td>
<td>“He made sure that we had what it takes to, you know, be successful in the legal field… that’s what you want coming to a college setting you know, especially getting your money’s worth for a class that you take.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Approachability</td>
<td>“...I loved the fact that the doors kind of like always open to talk with them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passion for Subject</td>
<td>&quot;Students want soul to the material because words are words it’s what you make of it...we want to feel what’s going on, we don’t want to just read.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative Teaching</td>
<td>Practical (real-world) Learning</td>
<td>“...her ability to relate real-world issues, actual issues that happened to her and it really like made the material that she was teaching more realistic…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>Interactive and Engaging Classroom</td>
<td>&quot;I value interaction a lot, I feel like not only can students learn from teachers they can learn from the comments that other students make.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Sub Themes</td>
<td>Supporting Quotes</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivations for Success</td>
<td>Family Support</td>
<td>&quot;...if I’m having trouble with anything just call my mom and ask her, or my dad, so having that support system, that foundation I think made a total difference you know.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downfall of Family/Peers</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;...even though I was kind of like some of my best friends, especially junior and senior year getting shot, getting locked up for life. It just wasn’t for me; I knew that I needed to stay fast to my goals.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Discipline</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;...I really honestly have never had a problem of never standing up for myself and saying no, it’s not who I am, it’s not what I do and that’s something I developed myself…&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Development and Community Support</td>
<td>Be with Like-Minded Peers</td>
<td>&quot;...I wanted to be around leaders or people who wanted to be leaders because I wanted to be a leader…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give Back to Community</td>
<td>“I think there’s no higher honor than serving your community.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunities Afforded</td>
<td>&quot;So I would say my involvement...made it possible for me to get such an internship.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development of Transferrable Skills</td>
<td>&quot;Being involved…I realize that same type of preparation is what needs to be done in class too.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Sub Themes</td>
<td>Supporting Quotes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reasons for Departure</td>
<td>Financial Concerns</td>
<td>&quot;...a lot of it is economic reasons because school is expensive… how am I going to fund this… I think that’s a very big underlying issue…&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not Academically Prepared</td>
<td>&quot;...they got to consistently work hard… a lot of people don’t realize that until they get here and then they get overwhelmed and that becomes too much.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of Self-Discipline</td>
<td>&quot;...many of the Black males don’t necessarily have a firm grasp on that sense of freedom that you get when you come to college… and that may be overwhelming for them because they were never truly taught about it.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Sub Themes</td>
<td>Supporting Quotes</td>
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<td>----------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support Services Needed</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>“Somebody that can coach you, somebody that’s been there before, or somebody that you respect you know. I think that would be significant…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Communication of Resources</td>
<td></td>
<td>“…a lot of students just don’t know who to go to at times to speak.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement of Local High Schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Collaborating with high schools in terms of preparing the, preparing Black males for what college is, what they can expect out of it…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>