

AN ANALYSIS OF SUCCESSFUL BLACK MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS'  
PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE ROLE OF  
EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

by

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SIGNED Kevin Dougherty

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## ABSTRACT

Research on Black males has continuously been approached from a monolithic perspective that indicates their plight of attendance and achievement in college. This nation has witnessed this decade of declining enrollment of Black males attending and achieving in college. The decreasing number has been apparent and paints a dismal reality for educational institutions, leaders, and students; particularly Black males. While this reality is continuously disturbing and draws immediate attention, successful Black male college students are achieving at a high altitude. Educational institutions and leaders are challenged to help increase Black male student attendance and achievement in college and universities. This challenge begins with switching the focus of what deters Black males from attending and achieving in college to what encourages them by approaching them from a success and not the common deficit model.

The purpose of this study was to analyze successful Black male college students' perceptions of their educational environments and the role of educational leaders. Participants were assessed on their perceptions of high school and college environments as well as their perceptions of high school and college educational leaders. A grounded theory approach was used to describe these perceptions. The participants included 21 non-intercollegiate undergraduate Black males, between the ages of 18-25, attending southwestern university (SWU). The data was based on the participants' responses from 21 semi-structured interview questions derived by the researcher.

The data revealed four major themes which included (1 positive perceptions of the high school and college educational environments; (2 negative perceptions of the high

school and college educational environments; (3 positive perceptions of the educational leaders in high school and college; and finally, (4 negative perceptions of educational leaders in high school and college. The findings exhibited the importance approaching Black males from a non-monolithic perspective. These Black male college students shared different experiences and perceived educational environments and leaders from various perspectives. The findings also showed the importance of focusing towards the success of Black males. The findings did reveal negative perceptions and experiences, yet this study gave credence to the importance of providing balance between positive and negative experiences of Black males.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION OF STUDY

This decade has witnessed a precipitous decline in the numbers of Black males attending college (Cross & Slater, 2000); however, there are still those motivated to attend and succeed in college regardless of barriers in K-12 schools, on college campuses, and in society (Dougherty, 2007; Harper, 2006). The experience of success for some Black males has been attributed to their willingness to accept help offered by significant others such as family, peers, and educational leaders in secondary schools (Cokley, 2003; Dougherty, 2007; Polite & Davis, 1999).

This dissertation described a qualitative research study that first analyzed successful Black male college students' perceptions of their high school and college educational environment and how these perceptions affected their attendance and achievement in college. Second, the study examined how successful Black male college students' perceptions of the role of educational leaders in high school and college affected their attendance and achievement in college. This study focused on the contributing factors to Black males enrolling in a predominantly White, four-year public Research I southwestern university (SWU) and academically succeeding in that university environment. The research was based on the responses of Black males from interview questions derived by the researcher.

Chapter 1 presents the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, assumptions and limitations of the study, and definitions of key terms. It concludes with the conceptual framework for the study.

### Statement of the Problem

A large number of Black male students attend and succeed in college. How are they able to be admitted to college and succeed in the face of their Black peers' high dropout rates in secondary schools (Hefner, 2004) and declining enrollments in college (Cross & Slater; 2000; Harper, 2006)? The importance of the role of family, peers, and siblings to the education of Black males is well documented (Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007; Smith & Fleming, 2006). However, more information is needed to determine the importance of the role educational leaders' play in contributing to Black males' success in higher education.

The impetus for studying the role of educational leaders in supporting African Americans' educational advancement has some roots in African American history. Over a 100 year ago, W. E. B. Dubois, as cited in Hefner (2004), stated, "Education is still an important indicator for future social success or failure" (p. 70). Prominent leaders such as Booker T. Washington and Mary McLeod Bethune established colleges and universities for African Americans' educational advancement (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). Hefner stated that education in the African American community was once viewed as the key to living the "American Dream" (p.70). Today, many African Americans are living this American Dream by successfully pursuing and achieving a higher education (Dougherty, 2007; Harper, 2006).

Recent literature confirmed the importance of the role of educators to students' success. Polite and Davis (1999) suggested that African American males in schools and society needed firmness, compassion, and an engaging style of teaching from their

teachers. The study found that Black males indicated that their best teachers respected them, inspired them to work hard, and made learning interesting and relevant. Polite and Davis also found that teachers believed African American males were perfectly capable of performing at high academic levels. With this thought process, according to Polite and Davis, “Teachers can aid Black males in sorting through career options and help them understand the importance of setting career objectives, specific achievement strategies, and a plan of action for fulfilling the course requirements needed to realize those goals” (p. 18).

Researchers Irvine (1990) and Ladson-Billings (1994) confirmed the importance of educators’ influence and explained how using a multicultural approach helped with students’ success. To help Black male students to succeed, Irvine asserted K-12 educational leaders must provide a curriculum that is more representative of and for all students. Irvine stated as the world was growing more diverse, incorporating a curriculum that was relevant for all cultures helped with students’ success. Ladson-Billings posited that how teachers taught affected how students perceived the content of the curriculum. Considering this statement broadly, the way teachers teach affects students’ academic achievement. Ladson-Billings maintained that K-12 educational leaders must foresee their actions as influences on student outcomes.

Recent literature has also verified the importance of the role educators played regarding Black males’ self-perceptions on their academic ability. Rascoe and Atwater (2005) stated, “Black male students’ perceptions regarding their academic ability facilitate understanding of what they will do and what they will not do in order to achieve

academically” (p. 890). Academic self-perception of ability involved attitudes, feelings, and beliefs in one’s intellectual or academic skills (Rascoe & Atwater, 2005). In Rascoe and Atwater’s work, Dixon (1998) stated that to encourage positive self-perceptions of academic ability, educators must provide learning situations where students can feel good about their academic environment and where they can establish a comfort zone. As students mature, they become more aware of their cognitive and social developments which allow them to consider perspectives of their teachers along with any inconsistencies (Rascoe & Atwater, 2005). Rascoe and Atwater posited, “Students’ self perceptions of academic ability influence their academic performance” (p. 891). With regard to Black males’ academic achievement, Garibaldi (1991) asserted the primary solution for improving self-perceptions and academic ability was education.

The above literature and research supported the important roles played by educational leaders in support of Black students. This study investigated perceptions of Black male college students of the educational environment and the role educational leaders played in their attendance and achievement in college.

To understand how Black males succeed academically, it is important to conceptualize some of the education problems they must overcome. Cross and Slater (2000) discovered that between 1965 and 1984, the percentage of all male African-American enrollments dropped slightly from 45.9% to 44.9%; however, this was only the beginning of the downward trend. Cross and Slater stated,

In 1997 Black men accounted for only 37.3% of all African-American enrollments. If this downward enrollment trend that has persisted over the past 14 years were to continue unabated into the future, by the year 2070 Black men would disappear altogether from the halls of higher education. (p. 2)

For all student enrollments, Harper (2006) stated that in 2002, the number of enrolled Black men consisted of only 4.3%, the same percentage as in 1976. Black male enrollments are essentially the same as they were 30 years ago.

University and K-12 educators have tended to report that all students have equal opportunities to attend college and receive a higher education. For example, Hefner (2004) noted that more Black males were dropping out of high school, and fewer were going to college. Because of the exposure to this widespread problem, schools and neighborhoods were potentially creating a culture of uncertainty. This uncertainty resulted in educational underperformance and devaluation because Black males were unsure of the benefits of educational achievement (Stewart, Stewart, & Simmons, 2007). Furthermore, according to Cross and Slater (2000), Black men born in the 1950s and 1960s understood that a higher education would not increase their employment opportunities because they were born in a world in which, by law or convention, good jobs were assigned nearly exclusively to Whites. The differential could also be due to the deficit thinking of educators. According to Garcia and Guerra (2004), educators believed that students were at fault because they entered school without the necessary prerequisite knowledge and skills.

Brown (2004) asserted that K-12 teachers did not understand the plight of young Black males. Because of this lack of understanding, teachers often considered them as a disciplinary problem or as having learning issues. With these diagnoses, young Black males were placed in detention, assigned to in-school suspension, suspended from school, or placed in special education classes more frequently than their non-Black male

counterparts. For instance, in Howard's (2008) work, The Office for Civil Rights Elementary and Secondary Civil Rights Compliance Report (2000) found that African American males made up approximately 7% of the nation's prekindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade student population. However, these Black males constituted make up a disproportionate percentage of students who are in special education, alternative schools, and remedial classrooms. According to Li (2007), Black males from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade ranked the highest in repeating a grade, suspension, and expulsion compared to any other racial/ethnic group. Cross and Slater (2000) further explained that this treatment of Black boys in elementary school translated into lower academic achievement by Black boys as they moved up from grade to grade.

Black men also encountered unnecessary stress from their Black peers while trying to achieve a higher education. Black students who achieved educationally were perceived as *acting White* by their peers (Brown, 2004). Bolman and Deal (1995) noted that African American adolescents viewed academic achievement as *acting White*; they rejected Black peers who did well in school. This avoidable stress contributed to problems Black men faced while attending a predominantly White institution (PWI). Jackson (2003) found that in Black males' transition at institutions of higher education, the matriculation process was hindered because of problems with cultural adjustment, isolation, alienation, and racism. Encountering these problems decreased the probability of these Black men graduating from college. Tinto (1987) asserted that to succeed, college initiation required students to undergo a form of cultural suicide, making a clean break from the communities in which they were raised. Essentially, students were

integrated and assimilated into the dominant culture of the colleges they attended. For a Black male, integrating and assimilating at a PWI was a more difficult process than it was for their White counterparts.

Hood (1992) explained how the academic, economic, institutional, and social processes that influenced college persistence varied by racial/ethnic group and gender. Moreover, Hood noted that these factors were compounded when factoring in Black males' opportunities to participate in college.

Black males have been previously researched as a monolithic group, a group in which, for example, all members made the same choices, viewed a college education in the same light, or responded identically to predominantly White learning environments (Harper, 2006).

Numerous factors and pitfalls contributed to the decline of success for Black men in college. These factors and pitfalls included life expectancy, health, incarceration, and the targeting or stereotyping of Black men (Kaba, 2005; Kaiser, 2006).

According to Kaba (2005), the average life expectancy for a U.S. citizen was 76.9 years; however, the life expectancy for Black men was 68.2 years, the lowest of all racial and ethnic groups. This low life expectancy was related to high homicide rates, which were the leading cause of death among Black men between the ages of 15 and 34 (Kaba, 2005). These Black men were six times as likely to be slain by other Black men. By killing members of their own racial/ethnic and gender group, Black men were decreasing their likelihood of receiving a higher education.

Another factor that may have contributed to Black men not attending college was their poor health. The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS, 2002) reported that for Black males 13 years and over, there were 106.7 new AIDS cases per 100,000 people over 12 months ending in June 30, 2001. These figures represented the highest numbers of cases in comparison to Black females as well as White males and White females. Considering the astounding numbers of Black males infected with this terminal disease, they should have been more focused on sustaining a healthy life.

The increasing number of incarcerated Black men was another contributing factor to their lack of participation in higher education. More Black men were likely to be found in prison than in college. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2003) discovered that in 1999, 757,000 Black men were in prison, whereas only 604,200 Black men were enrolled in college. Kaba (2005) reported that a year later in 2000, 791,600 Black males were incarcerated, whereas only 603,032 Black males were enrolled in college.

African American males outnumber all other ethnic groups in the prison population and have a rate of incarceration five times higher than the rate of White males (Howard, 2008). Moreover, the U.S. Census Bureau (2006) released data on the social, racial, and economic characteristics of people living in adult correctional facilities, college housing, and nursing homes. The data confirmed that more Black males resided in institutionalized housing (e.g., correctional institutions, nursing homes, and juvenile institutions) than non-institutionalized housing (e.g., college dormitories, military quarters, and group homes). Specifically, in 2000, 335,882 Black males between the ages

of 18 and 29 were in institutionalized housing, whereas 178,660 (nearly 50% fewer) were in non-institutionalized housing.

The Henry J. /Kaiser Family Foundation (2006) at Harvard University conducted the African American Men Survey to examine 2,864 participants' opinions about African American men. Participants included Black men and women as well as White men and women. From the numerous questions related to reasons why young Black men had a higher chance than most people of going to jail/prison, the opinion was largely that police officers targeted more Black men than Whites.

Many scholars (Hefner, 2004; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Noguera, 2003) displayed data depicting the challenges of Black men *en route* to receiving a higher education. These challenges included high school drop-out rates, poor schools, inexperienced teachers, non-college preparatory curricula, lack of parental support, and low socioeconomic status. These and other problems faced by Black males have been apparent for decades.

The above information described the untenable plight faced by many Black males. Acknowledging that some Black males overcome these plights and some do not provided a rationale for investigating the contributions educators make to Black males' attendance and achievement in college. Therefore, I examined successful Black males' perceptions of their high school and college educational environments and the roles played by educational leaders in their attendance and achievement in college.

### Purpose of the Study

This study analyzed Black male college students' perceptions of their high school and college educational environments and the roles educational leaders played in their attendance and achievement in college. This study is worthy of attention for two reasons. First, current researchers (Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007; Smith & Fleming, 2006) have extrapolated key findings on the role of parents, peers, siblings, and significant others who influenced and supported Black males' educational attainment. Second, previous researchers have focused on the negative factors and deficits that blocked Black males' academic achievement (Brown, 2004; Cross & Slater, 2000; Duncan, 2002). Although these researchers' contributed to the numerous explanations about the role of significant others and the deficit model that contributed to the paucity of Black males achieving a higher education, research has lagged in examining the role educational leaders play in influencing Black males' academic achievement.

Many Black males are motivated and aspire to go to college (Cokley, 2003; Dougherty, 2007), yet many others view college as impossible. Black males attending and succeeding in college today accept challenges and believe what Ralph Ellison (1952) stated in his famous book, *Invisible Man*: "My world has become one of infinite possibilities" (p. 576). Black males in college today also exemplify Ellison's message to Negro men in the 1940s and 1950s, "Life is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat" (p. 577).

Education is considered one of the major avenues to provide opportunities for infinite possibilities in life. A college education gives important credential status beyond

a high school education. Black men succeeding in college are potentially placing themselves in influential positions, establishing their voice and positive status and gaining new roles in society. An increase in the number of successful Black male students in college may help reverse the trend of Black males who are not achieving this credential status, whose voices may not be heard, and whose presence loses importance in society. Thus, these successful Black men attending college need to be queried and heard. With the data provided by this study, educational leaders would be better able to understand the perceptions of successful Black males, provide additional support to Black males, and help increase the enrollment and graduation of Black males at colleges and universities. Moreover, the research results may be instructive for Black males, families, and communities in need of more positive information and outcomes that are not readily available and may be absent in schools, homes, and to significant others.

This purpose of this study was to analyze Black male college students' perceptions of their educational environment and the roles of educational leaders. This research was significant for the following reasons:

1. The research captured successful Black male college students' stories about overall factors contributing to their attending and achieving in college.
2. The research findings expanded knowledge on successful Black male college students' perceptions on the high school and college educational environment.
3. The research findings described successful Black male college students' perceptions on the role educational leaders played in their attendance and achievement in college.

### Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions were made related to this study:

1. Black males will discuss openly and honestly their perceptions of high school and college educational environments and the role of educational leaders.
2. The results from the Black males' responses to the interview questions will be indicative of their perceptions of high school and college educational environments and the role educational leaders played in their attendance and achievement in college.
3. Black males will differentiate the degree of influence the educational environment and educational leaders had on their attendance and success in college.

### Limitations of the Study

The researcher acknowledged the following limitations of the study:

1. There is a potential for researcher bias because the principal investigator (PI) and the participants were Black males. Further, the potential for bias increased based on the PI conducting the interviews with the Black male students.
2. Owing to using a grounded theory approach in this study, data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted as theory was being developed. It was imperative that the PI avoided personal views and perspectives that would affect how data were collected and interpreted. Therefore, the PI attempted to ensure that the theory fit the data. The theory must be clearly stated and have generality.

Moreover, theory must be applicable in everyday situations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

### Operational Definitions

Educational Leaders. Included anyone who influenced the educational process and makes decisions. It included, but is not limited to, teachers, counselors, principals, professors, academic advisors, dean of students, president of university, etc.

African American/Black Males. Black or African American referred to people having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It included, but is not limited to, people who consider their race as “Black, African, African American, Negro, Nigerian, or Haitian” (Census, 2000).

Colleges and Universities. Predominantly White, four-year public Research I universities (Carnegie Foundation, 2006).

Black College Males. Freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors (based on credits and/or years) enrolled in college.

Successful. Advancing in the pursuit of achieving a higher education (*American Heritage College Dictionary*, 2004).

Perception. The process of becoming aware by insight, intuition, or knowledge gained by understanding (*American Heritage College Dictionary*, 2004).

Attendance in College. The act of being admitted or present (*American Heritage College Dictionary*, 2004).

Achievement in College. The act of accomplishing by means of skill, exertion, or perseverance (*American Heritage College Dictionary*, 2004).

Educational Environment. The conditions or surroundings serving to educate (*American Heritage College Dictionary*, 2004).

### Conceptual Framework

Instead of separating students' background knowledge, culture, and experiences from the curriculum, according to Dudley-Marling (2007), effective educators embraced these qualities and used them to help their students succeed. Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) supported this notion and contributed the following statement,

We should not begin with a search for student deficiencies as the explanation for their academic failure or success. Language and cultural diversity, poverty, crime and drug-ridden neighborhoods, single-parent female headed households may determine opportunity to learn, not capacity to learn. (p. 34)

Perry et al. (2003) further expressed that there must be a foundation of the experience of the teachers who do not fail to produce excellence in academic achievement, regardless of the background of the students.

Along with Perry et al. (2003), Polite & Davis (1999) shared similar sentiments regarding embracing all students, regardless of their backgrounds. Polite and Davis commented that many teachers forfeited their efforts when confronted with students who were indifferent, resistant, had behavior problems, or achieved below grade level.

According to Polite and Davis,

Effective teachers of African American males possess the emotional stamina, persistence, and resilience that enable them to negotiate the school bureaucracy, solve difficult problems, and help their students cope with the day-to-day setbacks and misfortunes as well as more serious hardships. (p. 10)

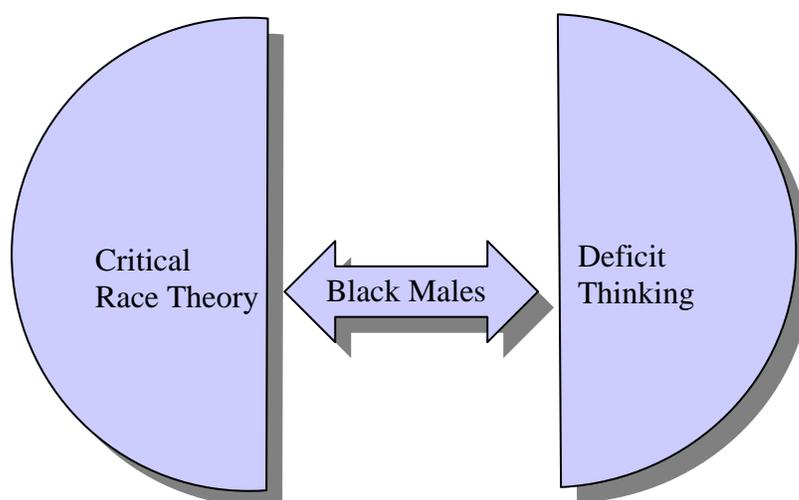
Approaching these Black males from a success standpoint may afford pertinent information to potential solutions of increasing Black men attending and achieving in college.

Black male college students should be analyzed from a success rather than a deficit standpoint. Numerous researchers (Dudley-Marling, 2007; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001) explained that students of color are commonly approached from a deficit perspective. Using a deficit thinking model in understanding successful Black male college students contradicts their success. Also, in this dominant deficit thinking approach, race may play a role. Race is an essential factor in determining Black males' educational opportunities. Understanding how race influences Black males' pursuit of higher education was very significant and worthy of attention. With these two common influences of Black males' success, critical race theory (CRT) and the deficit model provided a framework for understanding Black males' pitfalls and failures.

As stated above, when Black males are discussed, their race is an important component and a deficit approach was commonly considered. Figure 1 gives a visual representation of Black males' continuity between CRT and deficit thinking.

As illustrated in figure 1, a deficit approach assumed all Black male college students are understood only from a deficit perspective (Dudley-Marling, 2007; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Therefore, it is imperative to understand that Black males should not be studied from a monolithic approach, and deficit thinking must become "success thinking." Nonetheless, the framework for understanding Black males' pitfalls and failures through CRT is

*Figure 1. Black Males' Continuity between Critical Race Theory and Deficit Thinking*



discussed first followed by deficit thinking. I concluded with the contentions of emphasizing a success model conceptual framework (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999).

Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) stated,

The critical race theory framework for education is different from other CRT frameworks because it simultaneously attempts to foreground race and racism in the research as well as challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact on communities of color. (p. 63)

With the numerous studies and theories regarding the educational problems of Black men, CRT provided a perspective and insight for determining why and how the numbers of Black men are declining in college.

Black men have faced comprehensive issues that are difficult to examine and ascertain one coherent solution. Through CRT, different analyses can be used to help understand Black men. Citing Solorzano et al.'s (2000) work, Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) and Tierney (1999), emphasized that CRT offered insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogies that guide our efforts to identify, analyze, and transform the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominate racial compositions in and out of the classrooms.

Delgado & Stefancic (2001) asserted,

Color blindness will allow us to redress only extremely egregious racial harms, ones that everyone would notice and condemn. But if racism is embedded in our thought processes and social structures as deeply as many critical race theorists believe, then the “ordinary business” of society—the routines, practices, and institutions that we rely on to effect the world’s work—will keep minorities in subordinate positions. (p. 22)

As cited in Rochlin (1995), Delgado (1988) pointed out that people of color were different from their White counterparts because most minorities experienced racism every day while Whites rarely experienced or even noticed acts of subtle or overt racism. Furthermore, Howard (2008) stated, “Although CRT situates race at the center of its analysis, it recognizes the fluidity and multifaceted nature of identity for all individuals, and does not attempt to create monolithic constructions or experiences of any group” (p. 10).

The deficit model entailed many components. The deficit model or thinking is the act of placing the blame on the victim (Dudley-Marling, 2007). Dudley-Marling explained that the most persistent version of blaming the poor for their poverty implicated the deficient language of poor people as the cause of their academic and vocational failures. Deficit thinking permeated society in which schools and teachers mirror these beliefs (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Valencia (as cited in Skrla & Scheurich, 2001) (1997) argued that deficit thinking was deeply embedded in educational thought and practice; it pervaded schools that serve children from low-income homes and children of color. Among the research on Black men, the deficit approach provided another insight into why Black males struggle to achieve a higher education.

By looking through the lens of the deficit approach, it is hard to determine the success of Black males when some educators are fixated with this thought process; thus, blaming Black males for their failures. Solorzano (1997) asserted that the cultural deficit model contends that minority cultural values are dysfunctional and therefore the reason for low educational and later occupational attainment. Kretovics & Nussel (1994) and Persell (1997) (as cited in Solorzano, 1997) explained,

This deficit models gets applied in the classroom, and to students of color, by teachers who are professionally trained in colleges, and specifically in a teacher education curriculum that reflects an individualistic, and cultural deficit explanation of low minority educational attainment (p.13).

These embedded deficit approaches from professionally trained teachers gave a minuscule speculation of why Black males struggle in college.

The deficit approach hinders the learning process of students. This approach does not benefit students or their families. Dudley-Marling (2007) explained that the deficit

approach rendered students' background knowledge and experiences as futile. As Dudley-Marling mentioned previously, the students' background knowledge, culture, and experience are separated from the curriculum and are unavailable as resources to support students' learning, making learning more difficult. As Black males are separated from their background and culture while trying to assimilate in an environment that appears to deter their educational process, failure seemed to be the only expectation or conclusion.

CRT provided the understanding that race plays a major factor in everyday life. In order to get beyond racism, race has to be accounted for (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Deficit thinking is displayed in the thought process of educators and is potentially one of many aspects of determining why Black males are not educationally achieving. Furthermore, taking a "color blind" and/or a deficit approach continues to uplift racism while bewildering Black males' educational progress and process due to the embeddings of racism and deficit thinking.

Although CRT and deficit model/thinking have been used to analyze the pitfalls and failures of Black males, I contend that a "success model" should be emphasized when analyzing successful Black male college students in an effort to promote their success. By approaching successful Black males from a deficit perspective, Black males may continue to struggle in their pursuits toward a higher education. According to Perry, et al. (2003),

We cannot tolerate or support ideologies and practices that cripple our children further---those that hold that our children are the problem or those that assume that our teachers and school leaders are not capable of becoming powerful factors in the lives of students. (p.165)

By operating from a “success model” paradigm for Black males and viewing Black males from a successful perspective, one may thoroughly highlight those successful Black males who are commonly overshadowed by the pitfalls and failures of Black males. Analyzing these Black males from a success standpoint may derive potential solutions for increasing the number of Black men attending and achieving in college.

### Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 contained the introduction and statement of the problem. In addition, the purpose of the study, assumptions, limitations, operational definitions, and the conceptual framework were provided. Chapter 2 consists of a review of the related literature on Black males, foundational leadership, and contemporary allied leadership literature. Chapter 3 contains the research design and methodology, a description of the population and sample, site and setting, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 includes the presentation and data analysis. Chapter 5 entails the summary and discussion of findings, implications, and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Over 40 years ago, Malcolm X (as cited in Newman, 1998) stated, "Education is our, Black people, passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today" (p. 129). It is important to note that Malcolm X's statement still holds true today for everyone. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, education is the gateway to being gainfully employed and leads to a successful career for some level of economic security. Clearly, those who want a prosperous lifestyle seek to achieve an academic education by persevering through high school and college.

Unfortunately, far too many Black males drop out of school, now at disturbing rates. Educational leaders must use a variety of theories, research, and practices to gain the strength to persevere and to support all students, particularly those in need, including Black males. For Black males, among those who play a significant role in helping them persevere are educational leaders. Educational leaders, including such individuals as administrators, professors, teachers, counselors, community leaders, and parents play a critical role in students' success or failure, and a considerable portion of this role was determined by the way a school was managed and the leadership within the school (Fullan & Watson, 2000).

Educational leaders have operated from different perspectives within their schools. These different perspectives include Bolman and Deal's (2003) frames of leadership and Bass' (1998) work on transformational leadership. These leadership perspectives are important and needed within schools.

## Frames of Leadership

Bolman and Deal (2003) viewed leadership through these frames (i.e., structural, human resource, political, and symbolic) for an understanding of what leadership is and how it works. According to Bolman and Deal,

Each frame offers a distinctive view of major issues in change. The human resource frame focuses on needs and skills, the structural frame on alignment and clarity, the political frame on conflict and arenas, and the symbolic frame on loss of meaning and the importance of creating new symbols and ways. Each frame highlights a set of barriers and posits possibilities for making change stick. (p. 370)

### *Structural Frame*

The importance for all students, especially Black males, to reach their academic goals has resulted in the need for educational leaders to provide structure within their schools for teachers, administrators, counselors, and students to succeed. According to Bolman and Deal (2003), the structural frame presented the design of an organization. The structure was a blueprint for expectations and exchanges among internal members such as educational leaders and students. The leader had the role of clarifying goals and developing a clearly defined structure of what must be done. It was imperative for the leader to establish organizational objectives that individuals could use as a guide. Bolman and Deal stated, “Without a workable structure, people become unsure about what they are supposed to be doing” (p. 322). For example, in a school in which the educational leaders are uncertain of their role, students may be unclear about their purposes for being in school, potentially causing underperformance in their scholastic activities with regard to their personal and school expectations. A clear understanding of roles and relationships

and adequate coordination are essential to any well performing school (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

### *Human Resource Frame*

The human resource frame was about the people in the organization. In a school environment, the leader was responsive to his/her students' needs and supportive of their personal goals by showing concern, listening to their aspirations, and communicating personal warmth and openness (Bolman & Deal, 2003). In addition, the role of the leader was to bolster followers' own empowerment. Bolman and Deal stated, "The leader empowers through participation and openness and by ensuring that people have the autonomy and resources they need to do their job" (p. 324). The needs of students must be met, and in order for them to perform at a high-quality level, they must feel respected and a part of the school. Bolman and Deal asserted, "The human resource leader works on behalf of both the organization and its people, seeking to serve the best interests of both" (p. 324). For example, educational leaders must provide sufficient resources to assist other teachers and counselors in completing their duties and responsibilities for the success of their students. With this, teachers, counselors, and students are being served by their educational leaders (upper-level administrators). In addition, because the upper-level administrators are supplying their teachers and students with the necessary resources to assist in their performance of their duties, the administrators are benefiting their school.

### *Political Frame*

The political frame dealt with power distribution within an organization—who has the power, how it is used, and how the use of the power affects the agendas of internal members. Power is what potentially creates conflict within an organization. For example, Bolman and Deal (2003) explained that if Person A has something Person B wants, Person A has leverage. The authors noted that because of the interdependency among members, members need one another, and this creates power relationships. The leader must recognize this political reality and know how to navigate it for the betterment of the organization and employees. Bolman and Deal explained, “The job of the leader is to recognize major constituencies, develop ties to [his or her] leadership, and manage conflict as productively as possible” (p. 327). For instance, when teachers are new to a school and have replaced a well-known teacher in a classroom where students have developed a relationship with the original teacher, the novice teacher may experience resentment from the students, which can create conflict. Novice leaders must demonstrate their power through negotiating, bargaining, directing, and serving as a diplomat. Leaders must acknowledge the character, culture, and dynamic needs of the organization. With this recognition, leaders are creating an environment in which everyone benefits instead of only a select few.

### *Symbolic Frame*

Bolman and Deal (2003) described the symbolic frame as serendipitous and not linear. This symbolic frame embodies and expresses an organization’s culture—the beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that explain who the members are and how the

organization behaves. Bolman and Deal expressed that “Symbolic leaders are sensitive to an organization’s history and culture” (p. 329). Organizations are complex and constantly changing; this creates a culture that is both a product and a process. Bolman and Deal continued, “As a product, it embodies accumulated wisdom from those who came before us. As a process, it is constantly renewed and re-created as newcomers learn the old ways and eventually become teachers themselves” (p. 244). Educational leaders and students may become attached to certain symbols or historical information within their schools. These symbols could be the school mascot, programs, or prestigious awards in which the school has achieved. Because of these certain symbols within the school culture, effective symbolic leaders are passionate and use these symbols to make their school the best of its kind and exhibit this passion to others (Bolman & Deal, 2003). For example, when new students and teachers come into schools, current educational leaders should instill the history and traditions in these individuals. This creates the renewal of the history and traditions. Also, this creates a cyclical process in which these new students and teachers will themselves one day explain the history and traditions to prospective students and teachers.

### Transformational Leadership

Part of students’ success is contingent upon the leadership in schools and colleges. Because of the importance of the educational leaders’ role, their leadership must be more than just a behavioral characteristic. It must be viewed as an action (Sergiovanni, 1992), a mindscape leaders must acquire. For example, Sergiovanni (1992) explained how our mindscapes are mental pictures of how the world works, and what we do makes

sense if it matches our mindscapes. He further asserted that different mindscapes lead school administrators to interpret the same events differently. Therefore, educational leaders' adoption of the same mindscape results in more successful actions with students.

While continuing to consider students' success, Sergiovanni (1992) posited that leaders must understand how children learn and continue learning and must understand how to build a community of learners. As educational leaders view their leadership positions as action-oriented and filled with ideas, the continuity of students', schools', and colleges' success will continue. These are some of the essential characteristics of transformational leaders.

Transformational leaders are also proactive, raise awareness levels of followers about inspirational collective interests, and help followers achieve unusually high performance outcomes (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Bass (1998) contended that transformational leadership was charismatic, inspirational, intellectually stimulating, and individually considerate. Charismatic leaders behave in ways that result in their being role models for their followers. Bass (1998) explained, "Followers identify with the [transformational] leaders and want to emulate them; leaders are endowed by their followers as having extraordinary capabilities, persistence, and determination" (p. 5). Inspirational leaders motivate those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their followers' work. Intellectually stimulating leaders encourage creativity: "Transformational leaders stimulate their followers' efforts to be innovative and creative, which is done by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways" (Bass, 1998, p. 5). Considerate leaders demonstrate acceptance

of individual differences. Bass (1998) expressed, “Transformational leaders pay special attention to each individual follower’s needs for achievement and growth by acting as coach or mentor” (p. 6). These characteristics are particular components transformational leaders use to achieve superior results.

Transformational leaders are expected to define the need for change, create new visions, concentrate on long-term goals, inspire followers to transcend their own interests, and mentor followers through the use of personal values and beliefs (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). These attributes are critical for the success of students, schools, and colleges.

Today, more than ever, the significance of educational leaders’ role in influencing students’ achievement and advancement to graduation is remarkably high, owing to the accountability and standards movement (No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], 2002). The visibility of students’ success and failure is more prominent, and leaders are held more responsible. The visibility of Black males’ failure in the education system is but one example amplified by high dropout rates (Li, 2007); low high school graduation rates (Holzman, 2004); and declining admission, attendance, and graduation rates from college (Jackson & Moore, 2006). The enormity of school failure has created negative results for Black males and for society as a whole (Holzman, 2004). Therefore, the challenge for educational leaders is to take on new duties and tasks in areas in which they may be unfamiliar but must master for the sake of all students and for society. One new duty and task is using a multicultural perspective when interacting with their students.

### Contemporary Allied Leadership

In this society, it is evident that people are not homogenous and do not come from the same background. Although students are coming from different backgrounds, public schools have a tendency to approach all students from the same perspective, the Anglo-centric perspective. This current educational discourse on minority education utilizes a distorted meaning of culture and the culture role of schooling (Ogbu, 2003). Ogbu stated,

The curriculum and language of the public school are not intended or designed to replace the cultures and languages of ethnic minorities with those of mainstream White Americans. These knowledge and skills are “White” only in the sense that schooling in the United States is based on White culture and language because White people are the dominant group in the United States that controls the economic and other positions in adult life. (p. 40)

Ogbu (2003) furthered asserted that educational leaders must move away from this viewpoint to consider schools as institutions that prepare students for their future adult cultural tasks and roles in society. Because of the diverse student population and diverse society, educational leaders must know and understand the diversity of multiple cultures. When educational leaders continue to view and teach their students from their own cultural and ethnic perspectives, they are denying other experiences for themselves and students (Banks, 1999). Thus, educational leaders become prisoners of their own experiences and hold others to only their own views. Having a multicultural perspective helps provide an understanding of individuals’ backgrounds. Banks affirmed, “Multicultural education helps individuals gain greater self-understanding by [leaders’] viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures” (p. 2). Using this perspective in schools, colleges, and the curriculum, as opposed to only a single Anglo-centric, Afro-centric, or Hispanic-centric curriculum, helps all students better achieve. According to

Banks the Anglo-centric curriculum negatively affects students of color; these students of color find the school and college campus culture alien, hostile, and self-defeating. In contrast, although this multicultural perspective benefits marginalized groups, there is a misconception that multiculturalism only benefits these groups; rather, multicultural education is designed so that all students, including White, male, middle-class students (i.e., those most typically benefitting from an Anglo-centric curriculum), will acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively in a culturally and ethnically diverse world (Banks, 1999). Banks continued, “A major goal of multicultural education is to provide all students with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge needed to function within their ethnic culture, the mainstream culture, and within and across other ethnic cultures” (p. 2).

Creating a multicultural environment in schools and colleges is truly contingent upon the willingness and actions of the educational leaders. Sergiovanni (1992) discussed that leaders must understand how students learn in order to build a community of learners. Bass (1998) mentioned similar views. He stated that transformational leaders must pay special attention to each individual follower’s needs for achievement and growth. Educational leaders must be transformative to make this difference for their followers to achieve and grow. Transformational leadership is grounded in relationships (Banks, 2005). To create a multicultural environment, effective educational leaders build relationships with their students, staff, and communities. If leaders promote a multicultural environment, teachers will begin to possess the skills and knowledge to work effectively with a diverse population of students (Banks, 2005).

Gay (2003) also discussed the need for multicultural educators. She began by stating that teachers are frequently not of the same race, ethnicity, class, or background as their students. Therefore, it behooves educators to acquire a variety of teaching styles to achieve common learning outcomes for all students.

Gay (2003) developed five principles of practice toward becoming a multicultural educator. The first principle was that ethnic-specific literature was a viable source of knowledge about and experience with ethnic and cultural diversity. Gay stated that *ethnic-specific literature* was comprised of fictional and nonfictional writings about people of color. Although this specific literature cannot replace factual information gained from nonfictional texts, it offers insights into aspects of culture in those particular groups.

The second principle of practice was that critical discourse about ethnically and culturally diverse issues, challenges, and opportunities was essential to the multicultural agenda. Having a discussion about cultural challenges was only the beginning. Gay (2003) noted, “It is not enough to get factual information or to receive it passively; rather, one needs to analyze it, critique it, reflect on it, and act on it” (p. 84). In addition, experiences and stories from various ethnic, cultural, social, and gendered backgrounds are imperative (Gay, 2003).

Analyzing and reflecting on personal experience with ethnic cultural diversity as a means of multicultural education teaching and learning was Gay’s (2003) third principle of practice. For a multicultural existence, educational leaders must critically engage in their own assumptions about race, class, and gender. The need to restructure disciplinary

premises, content, and methodologies to make them more reflective of and responsive to multicultural education was the fourth principle. Because conventional subjects do not include perspectives of ethnically diverse groups, learning how to weave multicultural education into these subject areas is imperative (Gay, 2003). The final principle was to translate multicultural principles to personal and professional domains of being. Effective educational leaders hold themselves accountable to the same process they expect of their students around issues of multicultural education (Gay, 2003).

Stephan (1999) contributed the idea that multiculturalism helps to create an environment that uplifts ethnic and cultural diversity and reduces stereotyping of marginalized groups. *Stereotypes* are traits attributed to certain groups which frequently have detrimental effects (Stephan, 1999). Two common examples of stereotypes are African Americans being viewed as superior athletes or Asian Americans being viewed as intellectually superior. Awareness of negatively stereotyping others is essential for educational leaders and students to learn. Stephan expressed, “Because of their [young, immature] age, students seem to be particularly prone to rely on stereotypes as a shortcut to dealing with the complexities of the social world” (p. 2). These stereotypes are potentially furnished by the mass media, family members, or friends. Moreover, these stereotypes become the basis for interactions with members of marginalized groups (Stephan, 1999). By incorporating a multicultural perspective for schools and colleges, educational leaders can begin to strengthen their knowledge as well as that of their students about the culture of marginalized groups. With this knowledge, educational

leaders and students can help change the stereotypes of these groups and, in turn, create positive links across these groups.

There is a substantial amount of literature and research on foundational theories, culture, and change and how they can play a role in student achievement. Yet, this literature has resulted in a paucity of information connecting components of organizational theory and leadership qualities with a multicultural perspective. Instead of viewing multiculturalism as a separate entity, it should be considered in conjunction with foundational leadership theory. Integrating a multicultural perspective helps to address all students, especially students of color who are commonly marginalized. As for the plight of Black males, this multicultural perspective may be beneficial in helping to reverse negative perceptions of them.

By not accepting these opportunities and challenges to reach all students from a multicultural perspective, educational leaders become prisoners of their own experiences. These educational leaders operate from their *common place* and only use their experiences to guide them. Nonetheless, a pertinent challenge is to improve academic success for Black males. This challenge for educational leaders is vital for the educational achievement of Black males because they, Black males, are declining in college attendance.

The decline in numbers of Black males attending college can be attributed to the factors previously discussed (i.e., life expectancy, health, incarceration, and being targeted by police) as well as other factors such as the lack of Black male faculty representation (Flowers & Jones, 2003), institutional racism (history of exclusion of

certain groups of color (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998), lack of Black male peers to whom they can relate (Brown, 2004), or the lack of understanding of Black men (being ignored; Duncan, 2002; hooks, 2004). Although this decade has witnessed a precipitous decline in the numbers of Black males attending college, there are still those motivated to succeed and graduate regardless of the barriers in schools, on college campuses, and in society. Henceforth, it is important to note that Black males are not a monolithic group to be studied collectively, but individually in the landscape or the terrain of educational institutions.

When discussing Black males in schools, it is critical to understand that other components such as race/ethnicity, culture, and family background must be considered (Gibbs, 1988). Gibbs (1988) explained that it is imperative for public schools to become more effective for minorities: “Because of changing population statistics, the nation’s future work force not only will depend on these students, but also its future leaders” (p. 38). Black males face a variety of barriers that prevent them from graduating from high school and attending college; when matriculating in college, these students face challenges to achieve and graduate. Instead of grouping all students together, Black males must be disaggregated from other students as well as each other because there are Black males who are achieving. Thus, these individuals must be recognized to help lead other struggling Black males.

To help ensure the achievement of Black male students, educational leaders must be equipped with a diverse body of theories and theorists. In the next section of this chapter, I discuss other theories and theorists relating to Black males in society and how

these literatures relate to education in addition to the previously mentioned leadership theories and theorists.

W. E. B. Du Bois (1903), arguably one of the greatest scholars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, spoke about *The Talented Tenth*. Dr. Du Bois was a noted scholar, editor, and African American activist. As a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), he also spoke of the importance of The Talented Tenth. Du Bois explained that The Talented Tenth would be a small group of Black people who would uplift other Black people and lead them away from contamination and destruction through education. Furthermore, Du Bois explained that The Talented Tenth of the Negro race would be saved by its exceptional men.

#### Integration of Foundational and Allied Leadership:

##### Examination of Black Males

To examine the factors influencing Black males who pursue a higher education, I reviewed the literature as it was related to the status of Black men in education and society, their family support, and features of achievement motivation. This literature revealed impediments and influences to success in higher education for Black males.

##### *Understanding of Black Men*

Research (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gosa & Alexander, 2007) has indicated that it has been a struggle for Black men pursuing a higher education—the kind of struggle in which some endure and succeed and others fall by the wayside. This struggle could be attributed to many factors, but one common struggle experienced by Black men in PWIs is that of being a small and *strange* population. In Duncan's (2002) study in schooling

adolescent Black males, he explained, “Because Black males are constructed as a strange population, that is, as a group with values and attitudes that are fundamentally different from other students, their marginalization and oppression are understood as natural and primarily of their own doing” (p. 10). Limited understanding of Black males by some education leaders has perpetuated the cycle of limited opportunities. When educational help is given, Black male students are affected by this perpetuating cycle because the perception of strangeness and low expectations still contributes to their further marginalization (Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005; Duncan, 2002). Rather, this help becomes patronizing and pretentious. Furthermore, the condescending language used by some teachers, students, faculty, and staff members to describe these young men’s circumstances underscores the notion that they are naturally, academically, and socially deficient and that they are, themselves, largely, if not solely, to blame for their marginalization and exclusion at school (Duncan, 2002). For instance, in Ascher and Branch-Smith’s work on Black suburbs and public schools, they found a significant factor that negatively influenced the achievement of African American students. They found those teachers, administrators, and the community labeled students as “urban” or “inner city,” with the implied expectations of “urban dysfunctions” and lower goals for student success. This low expectation is critical because educational leaders’ expectations affect student achievement. This language and labeling can imply subtle racism and blatant deficit thinking, causing Black males to internalize the messages that they are not naturally, academically, or socially able to achieve.

Brown (2004) expressed that Black males tell themselves they are undesirable and will not amount to much in society; therefore, sooner or later, many young Black males accept and internalize this message and begin to lower the expectations they have for themselves; this is known as the *self-fulfilling prophecy*. With this internalization and with Black males being deemed as strange, society begins to reject a population that is different from the mainstream (Duncan, 2002). It is difficult for these Black males to prosper when they are rejected by schools, colleges, and society in general. This rejection can be attributed to the culture of the school environment. For instance, Schein (2004) defined culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions. If the assumption of some educational leaders toward Black males was for them to fail, it is difficult to foresee Black males' achievement.

Once there is an assumption in certain schools, colleges, or communities that all Black males are doomed to fail, the majority will fail (Polite & Davis, 1999). Instead of relying on the assumption that all Black males will fail, educational leaders must set the example conceptualization (Kouzes & Posner, 1987) in which Black males can succeed. Cokley (2003) stated, "When individuals see themselves as academically and intellectually capable students, and when this idea is reinforced by teachers and family, they are more likely to want to do well in school" (p. 5). Polite and Davis (1999) explained that there must be a belief that African American males are perfectly capable of performing at high academic levels. Educators must be concerned with more than academics for the success of Black males. Polite and Davis discovered that successful educators of African American males accepted responsibility for nurturing in their

students the prerequisite skills and knowledge needed for success in school. Furthermore, these educators accepted the institutional goal of promoting cognitive growth; their role was not confined to developing academic skills but included the social and emotional growth of students. Polite and Davis further explained that educators must understand that African American males are haunted by and must overcome the negative portrayals of who they are. Thus, educators must learn as much as possible about the community in which the Black male lives.

Nonetheless, these steps to enhance the successes of Black males are continuously overlooked. Instead of educational leaders describing Black males as naturally, academically, and socially deficient, effective educational leaders strive to change their perceptions of Black males. In Fullan's (2003) work on change, he mentioned educational leaders must create a learning environment that is appealing to students. Educational leaders must change the negative perception of Black males to help create a learning environment appealing to and inclusive of Black males. Literature (Hefner, 2004; Osborne, 1999) has constantly demonstrated the underachievement of Black males within schools and society. With this rejection, Black males' family support plays a significant role in potentially mediating such barriers in this process to higher education.

#### *Family Support of Black Men*

Brown (2004) stated that embedded racism in this country may have caused a detrimental effect on the upbringing of Black males generally. He explained that Black mothers were very overprotective of their sons during slavery, due to the numerous

lynchings of Black men. In turn, Black males developed the concept that every woman, including female school (K-12) teachers, was supposed to treat them in this overprotective manner; however, as previously stated, some teachers have a lack of understanding of Black males. Therefore, teachers considered these Black male students as disciplinary problems or as having learning issues (Brown, 2004). Because teachers lacked an understanding of the history of Black males, they characterized these students as having an inherited punitive setback. Therefore, instead of educators addressing the embedded racism in which Black males have had to endure or challenge their deficit thought process, Black parents inform their sons to suppress racism.

Fordham (1996) emphasized,

Parents encourage their sons to concurrently accept subordination and the attendant humiliation [for survival in the larger structure is a blueprint for expectations and exchanges among internal players such as leaders and followers (Bolman & Deal, 2003)] and preserve gender domination (for survival in the black community). (p. 148)

She also stated that Black parents urged their sons to downplay the significance of racism in their lives even as they encouraged them to adopt patriarchal attitudes and behaviors to be both non-dominating and successful in a racialized patriarchy. In Smith and Fleming's (2006) work on African American parents, they also shared their sentiments on Black males "surviving." Smith and Fleming found that African American parents wanted their sons to "survive" or "make it in America" because of their fear of their sons being easily lost to the American criminal justice system. Thus, the majority of these African American parents expected their sons to attend community colleges as opposed to four-year colleges to be closer in proximity to home. These parents wanted their sons on

trajectories that would help them survive in the streets while avoiding conflicts with law enforcement and criminal elements. Because of this perspective, Black families may contribute to the educational woes of Black male students by providing them with untenable strategies for negotiating hostile academic climates (Fordham, 1996; Smith & Fleming, 2006).

Interestingly, for those African American families with economic and educational resources in the home, well-off African American youth are not achieving at the levels of their White peers (Gosa & Alexander, 2007). Gosa and Alexander expressed that success in school had been the traditional route to upward mobility in American society; also, parents were able to pass their advantages on to their children. However, this transmission of success from Black parents to their children has proven to be more problematic than for White families. For example, Gosa and Alexander stated, “A college degree and high income didn’t insulate African American life chances from dependence on Whites. In consequence, Black managers, teachers, and doctors found it difficult to provide opportunities for their children” (p. 289). Most middle-class Black families are first generation middle-class Black families; their roots stretch far into neighborhoods and homes of truck drivers, assembly line workers, and waiters (Gosa & Alexander, 2007). In contrast, White middle-class families often go back three or four generations. According to Gosa and Alexander, this notation was significant because the cultural content (e.g., values, attitudes, and habits used by parents of successful children to reinforce the school’s agenda) was cultivated over time. Thus, a family lineage of high educational attainment and economic security was fostered. Black families were not

exposed to these family lineages of high educational attainment and economic security, thus Black males may continue to struggle with their achievement motivation.

Importantly, as previously stated, this is not true for all Black males. Parents are also encouraging their sons to achieve academically despite the hardships they may encounter or the lack of high educational attainment and economic security within their families. Barnett (2004) discovered that students received endless support from their parents throughout high school, which guided them to college. Gosa and Alexander (2007) stated that parents were helping to build a foundation for their children by providing emotional support, encouragement, and structure. These parents exhibited behaviors to establish support for their children's schooling. Gosa and Alexander explained that the family was the child's launching pad; how the parents conducted themselves in relation to their children did much to determine the path eventually followed.

Black males continue to observe the notion of their strangeness and continue to be raised to suppress racism; rarely are Black males socialized to understand how they can triumph through these instances. Because of these perceived negative influences from family and schools, Black males may look to their Black male peers for another perspective to assist with their progress to higher education.

#### *Educational Achievement of Black Men*

Even though Black males faced the challenges of being rejected in schools, colleges, and their families informing them not to address racism, many Black males still may succeed and achieve in school; however, these Black males are often looked down

upon by their Black male peers who found their achievement in the streets. Stated earlier, Black males who achieve educationally are labeled as *acting White* by their peers who found their achievement non-educationally (Brown, 2004). This negative criticism places unneeded stress upon achieving young Black males in school, and this unnecessary stress, at times, makes these academically aspiring Black males choose between these different achievements during their elementary, middle, and high school years. For instance Graham (as cited in Cokley, 2005) (1997) explained how African American adolescents at an all-Black middle school nominated students they admired, respected, and wanted to be like. Graham found that African American boys were less likely to nominate high-achieving African American boys as students they admired or respected. Although Graham did not interpret this finding as a sign of acting White, he understood African American boys wanting to be viewed as “cool.” Educational leaders must consider these potential internal and external factors for the achievement of Black males. These factors must be strategically used *en route* to motivate Black males.

Cross and Slater (2000) denoted this educational achievement process as an *anti-achievement ethic*. They explained,

Black males who seek to improve their opportunities through the educational process are constantly subjected to abuse and rejection by their peers. They are often accused of "acting white." Among many young blacks, profound shame attends charges of acting white. (p. 7)

As discussed earlier, these Black males take these experiences with them in their transition to colleges and universities (Jackson, 2003). As a result, the cultural adjustment issues Black males face while attending institutions of higher education seem unconquerable. Furthermore, if a student fails, the blame falls on the individual—not the

institution—because the student was unable to culturally integrate (Tierney, 1999). In this way, Duncan (2002) stated that the literature regarding Black males frames the issue of their schooling in terms of a dilemma. According to Duncan, regardless of whether Black male students choose to achieve academically, they are the victims. By not achieving an education, Black males do not receive the credential status; however, by achieving academically, they are looked down upon by their Black male peers who chose not to succeed educationally.

Although some Black males may experience difficulties from their peers, there are Black males who are motivated to attend and achieve in college. For example, Cokley (2005) conducted work on the academic motivation of African American students attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and predominantly White colleges and universities (PWCUs). He defined motivation as intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic academic motivation involved engaging in academic behaviors for the purpose of learning. Extrinsic academic motivation involved engaging in academic behaviors because it was seen as instrumental to achieving some goal. Considering these types of motivations, Cokley found that African American students attending HBCUs were more intrinsically motivated than African American students attending PWCUs. In contrast, African American students reported higher extrinsic motivation at PWCUs than African American students at HBCUs. Regardless of the types of motivations, these students were still motivated to attend college.

Freeman (2005) found different motivating factors contributing to African American students considering HBCUs and PWIs. African American students who

attended predominately White private high schools were more likely to consider HBCUs (Freeman, 2005). Freeman discovered African American students attending predominately White high schools wanted to search for their roots or connection with the African American community. According to Freeman, these students expressed “living in two different worlds.” These African American students were often pressured by their family, friends, and neighborhoods to be African American. Simultaneously, these students were pressured by their school to “act White” (Freeman, 2005). These students were disappointed in their school’s efforts for acknowledging their culture and history. Freeman also found that having an HBCU connection (e.g., teacher, family member, or friend) greatly influenced these students consideration of HBCUs.

On the other hand, African American students attending predominately African American high schools strongly preferred PWIs (Freeman, 2005). These African American students expressed getting to know different cultures from different people with different attitudes. Freeman stated that these African American students attended high school in predominately African American neighborhoods; therefore, their interactions with other ethnic groups were limited. According to Freeman, “This lack of being in a mixed environment seemed to influence their perception of the responsibility and value of sharing their culture. Therefore, their lack of interaction with Whites influenced their consideration of attending PWIs” (p. 93).

It is important to note that the majority of students who attended private high schools ultimately attend PWIs (Freeman, 2005). In addition, students who attended predominately African American high schools who consider PWIs were less likely to be

recruited by these institutions. These students exhibited their motivating factors to attend college whether the colleges were HBCUs or PWIs.

The majority of findings regarding the status of Black males are a major concern. These findings showed the struggles that Black men encounter consistently because of their race, family support, school environment, and peers. Despite these findings and the fact that the number of Black men attending institutions of higher education is decreasing, Black males are attending and achieving. Different support programs have been established to aid in the success of Black males. For instance, the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) was established in 1990 by Dr. Tyrone Bledsoe to address the academic challenges of African American males at Georgia Southwestern State University (Cuyjet, Bonner, Bailey, Brown, & Harper, 2006). This organization was designed such that educational institutions and systems should take the blame for the majority of young Black men's failing to complete a Baccalaureate degree. Cuyjet et al. stated that SAAB assisted Black males to excel academically, socially, culturally, personally, and professionally. In addition, SAAB accepted the challenge of carrying the shield to overcome obstacles to Black males facing a brighter life (Cuyjet et al., 2006). SAAB has been established at different universities such as The University of Texas-Austin (a large, public, Research I university), The Ohio State University (a large, public university in a small town), and The University of Toledo (a large, public, research-based university). Another example of support programs is the Black Men's Collective (BMC), a program created at Rutgers University in 1992 that seeks to provide a multigenerational

forum for Black males to connect and discuss issues pertinent to their success through the use of diverse cultural, political, and sociological perspectives (Cuyjet et al., 2006).

These types of programs and initiatives must be increasingly established to help reverse this declining trend of Black men's success. Black males need the opportunity to voice their success and achievements instead of the normal, perplexing deficit approaches. Changes in conditions undermining Black male students' achievement are needed by investigating their academic and social experiences in schools (Duncan, 2002).

A concrete step towards eliminating oppression of Black male students and providing space for their narratives is in challenging the structures of domination in schools. Challenging domination consists of eradicating institutional conditions in schools that inhibit or prevent students from participating in determining their actions or the conditions of their actions. A challenge begins with an invitation to young black males to speak their piece and with our willingness to see the world through their eyes, the way it is rather than the way we think it is or want it to be. (Duncan, 2002, p. 11)

While still addressing the multiple issues that Black males suffer, conversations with Black males who are achieving in colleges must occur to help ascertain their perceptions of their educational environment and the role of educational leaders who affected their attendance and achievement in college.

#### Summary

The extant literature regarding Black males has produced a common theme: Black males are a struggling monolithic group that has been continuously researched from a deficit approach. This monolithic perspective dictated how Black males are struggling as a group. In addition, this deficit approach has blamed Black males for their own pitfalls

and failures. Because of this monolithic and deficit framework, this has caused successful Black males to be overshadowed by the overall troubles of their peers.

Literature has displayed how race, family, schools, and peers of Black males have contributed to their pitfalls and failures. However, instead of continuing to research Black males in the monolithic and deficit perspective that depicts why they struggle to achieve, attention needs to be given to those Black males who are succeeding by focusing on a success model. To proceed with a success model, the role of educational leaders is essential. Educational leaders must be willing to challenge and change their traditional paradigms and perceptions regarding Black males. For example, instead of focusing on what prevents Black males from achieving, educational leaders need to focus on what helps with their success. Dougherty (2007) conducted a pilot study to ascertain how family, high school, peers, and race and racism influence Black males' motivation to attend and achieve in college. This pilot study determined that Black males were motivated by their family, peers, race, and racism to attend and achieve in college. The literature of Black males and the information gained from this pilot study set the stage for a larger research study. The research design for this larger is explained in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze Black male college students' perceptions of their educational environment and the roles of educational leaders. Literature has extensively discussed Black males' struggles, barriers, and the hardships they endure which prohibit their ability to attend and achieve in college. Instead of contributing to the commonality of why Black males are unable to succeed, I chose to approach this study from a success model to determine why some Black males are able to achieve. These Black males' voices and stories need to be heard. In addition, this study determined the role educational leaders played in helping these Black males attend and achieve in college. Because of the necessity of hearing these Black males' voices and stories, the research design in this study provided rich, detailed, and descriptive data. Therefore, the research methodology used in this study was a qualitative study utilizing a *grounded theory* approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each research question was designed to ensure a thorough and accurate representation of each participant's experiences and to create theories based on these findings. For the purposes of this chapter, I discuss each aspect of the research and data analysis design.

This chapter outlines the processes and procedures for this research study. The first section gives an overview of the methodology, followed by a statement of the research questions. Subsequent sections describes the population and sample that were used in the study, instrumentation, data collection, and the data analysis methodology.

As the literature review demonstrated, Black males are commonly studied from a deficit approach. Literature has continuously shown the factors that contributed to Black males not succeeding by attending and achieving in college. Thus, additional research that speaks to Black males' successes needs to be addressed for a balance in the literature. By focusing my attention on a specific population, freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior (non-athlete) Black males attending a PWI at a southwestern institution and implementing a grounded theory approach, I was able to immerse myself in the research process, data, and analysis. Dougherty (2007) demonstrated the importance of submerging the researcher in the research process, data, and analysis en route to developing a theory. Dougherty determined that by using a grounded theory approach, he was able to develop a theory from the data collected. By using a grounded theory approach and developing a theory based on the data, the stories and experiences of Black males were heard. Thus, Dougherty discovered that grounded theory was most appropriate because this study aids in the understanding of Black males' motivation to attend and achieve in college. Due to the lack of literature on Black males' successes, grounded theory provided the opportunity to develop theories from the participants' data.

A grounded theory approach was employed to examine the factors contributing to the enrollment of Black males at a southwestern university (SWU). Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated, "Grounded theory is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon" (p. 23). Grounded theorists attempt to formulate systematic guidelines for collecting and

analyzing qualitatively derived data, with the goal of building hypotheses that support the data, rather than collecting data that fit into a specific hypothesis (Smith-Sebasto & Walker, 2005). The grounded theory approach was used to help understand the processes that have contributed to participants' current circumstances. Strauss (1995) posited, "Grounded theory necessarily gathers up and helps to integrate what previously have been discrete theories, and elements of theories, that bear on the phenomena you are focused upon" (p. 12).

The grounded theory approach aided the researcher in constructing a model that, explained underlying factors of Black male college enrollment. Importantly, grounded theory immersed the researcher in the data and relied on his interpretation. Using this approach, the data collected from Black males identified the factors related to undergraduate enrollment of Black males.

Because there is limited research on the motivating factors of Black males to attend and achieve in college, I developed my own research questions. The following research questions were examined in this study:

1. How do Black male college students perceive their educational environments (i.e., high school and college)?
2. How do Black male college students perceive the influence of their educational environments (i.e., high school and college) on their college attendance and achievement?

3. How do Black male college students perceive the influence of educational leaders (i.e., high school and college) on their college attendance and achievement?

#### Site and Setting

This study took place at a southwestern university (SWU). The SWU was a large, public, Research I institution. The SWU was a PWI with an enrollment of over 36,000 students. In addition to a large student population growth, considering the enrollment of African American students, particularly Black males, was important. The total African American student enrollment was 1,041 (482 men), with a 2.83% of all student enrollments in 2006 (Office of Institutional Research, 2006). Because many large colleges and universities compare data with peer institutions, conducting a study related to Black males' perceptions on the educational environment and the role of educational leaders was a unique opportunity. Thus, the results from this study were invaluable for many large universities across the nation.

#### Population and Sample

Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the SWU. Approximately 21 Black males from this university were asked to voluntarily participate in this study. These Black male (non-athlete) undergraduate students were enrolled freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors (based on credits and/or years). The participants were selected using a purposive, non-random, homogenous sampling approach. *Purposive sampling* allows the researcher to specify characteristics of interest in a population (e.g., undergraduate Black males [non-athletes] in the university; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). *Homogenous*

*sampling* is a selection of a subgroup of Black males (non-athletes) considered uniform in experience and attitudes (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). Therefore, in this purposive, non-random, homogenous sampling approach, student-athletes were deliberately eliminated as participants because of their unique circumstances. For instance, in Person and LeNoir's (1997) work on African American male athletes, they found the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I schools reported 45% more African American women were enrolled than African American men (158,095 women to 108,606 men). However, in terms of student athletes, according to Person and LeNoir, there were 3.2 times as many African American male athletes as African American female athletes (12,195 men versus 3,591 women). Furthermore, Black male athletes made up one-third of the total number of all male student athletes. Person and LeNoir noted that the majority of Black male athletes' primary goal was not education and had they not been recruited for athletics, many would not be attending college. Yet, a common goal of Black male athletes was providing assistance to their families, communities, or becoming a professional athlete (Hawkins, 1997). Based on these potentially unique circumstances of Black male student athletes attending college, they were excluded from this study.

The participants were contacted through various methods. One method was to send e-mails (see Appendix A) through the African American Student Association (AASA) listserv. Another method was utilizing Facebook.com; an online community of college students segmented by various institutions of higher education throughout the country, to solicit other SWU Black male students. I created a profile on this website and

searched for SWU non-intercollegiate Black male students who fit my criteria. I then sent emails asking if these students would like to participate in my study. Signs were also created and posted, about my research study, throughout SWU's campus in different academic buildings to solicit these participants (see Appendix B). Further, the researcher solicited Black males via observations from walking on the campus of the SWU. In each e-mail and conversation, the content of the investigation was explained in detail. In each of these methods, the researcher's contact information was provided for the potential participants.

The identity of potential participants remained confidential during this recruitment process. The individuals who wanted to participate in this study contacted the researcher via e-mail or phone rather than responding via the listserv. These potential participants received an informed consent form explaining participation in this study and requiring their signature. The informed consent explained that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time during this investigation. Because the researcher was a hall director for Residence Life, for the potential participants who were residents in the residence halls, the researcher explained that their participation was separate from the relationship of hall director to residents. Furthermore, their participation would not dictate the relationship between the researcher and the participants. All resident issues were avoided for this study.

## Data Collection

As previously discussed, a grounded theory approach was used for this investigation. Due to this approach, open-ended, semi-standardized interviews were conducted on each participant individually. According to Berg (2007),

Semi-standardized involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and special topics. These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress; that is the interviewers are permitted to probe far beyond the answer to their prepared standardized questions. (p. 95)

These semi-standardized interviews (see Appendix C) allowed the interviewees to provide information (facts and opinions) because the researcher approached the interview from the participant's perspective (Berg, 2007). In Dougherty's (2007) pilot study, he developed a questionnaire to guide his interviews. His questionnaire was based on the literature regarding Black males' race, family, secondary school experiences, and peers. Dougherty discovered his questions were effective in addressing the motivating factors regarding Black males' family, peers, and race and racism. However, Dougherty realized that his pilot study did not adequately address Black males college students' perceptions of their educational environment and the role educational leaders played in their attendance and achievement in college. Therefore, Dougherty's interview questions were altered for this larger study to effectively address how Black male college students' perceptions of their educational environment (i.e., high school and college) and the role of educational leaders (i.e., high school and college) influenced their attendance and achievement in college.

To ensure complete comfort for each interviewee, I offered to conduct the interview at a location designated by the interviewee. Their comfort level provided the potential opportunity for the interviewees to provide useful and essential information. As an alternative location to conduct the interview, I offered my office.

In addition to explaining and having the participants read the informed consent form, I guaranteed autonomy and confidentiality, explained that each interview would be recorded by an audio digital recorder to ensure accurate data collection, and explained that field notes would be taken to account for what the researcher heard, experienced, and saw regarding the participant's body language. The interviewees understood that they could decline to answer a question and that at any time they could decide to discontinue the interview process (see Appendix D).

The researcher was looking for information throughout the interviews for the investigation, yet the researcher was also cognizant of the type of information that was provided by the interviewees. For example, if the interviewees disclosed information regarding academic difficulties troubles or self-identified for depression, the researcher provided referral information so they could seek professional help.

#### Data Analysis

In accordance with grounded theory, data analysis commenced when data collection began—recruiting participants and the open-ended interviews. This approach demonstrated how I met the requirements of grounded theory research because the theory was grounded in the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Constant comparative methods were used in the data analysis in which I continuously worked with the data and the developing grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained constant comparative method aids analysts in generating a theory that is integrated, consistent, plausible, and close to the data. In this process, I remained connected with my conceptual framework. I conducted the data analysis in accord with the methods of Strauss and Corbin (1990) in which *open coding, axial coding, and selective coding* shaped the analysis. Open coding is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data and begins after initial data have been collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this process, many different categories are identified. Axial coding occurs when data are put back together in new ways by making connections between categories. Axial coding followed open coding in which I developed concepts into categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I analyzed the sorts of themes, concepts, and ideas the participants identified. Axial coding also develops the basis for selective coding. The selective coding was the final stage of the analysis in which I looked for the patterns, connections, and inter-relationships in the responses by participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Selective coding is the process of selecting the core category, the central phenomenon in which all the other categories are integrated, which validated relationships. These patterns of common concepts, themes, and ideas assisted me in interpreting the results to develop the central thrust of the grounded theory. Lastly, these themes assisted in the creation of the story line of the main idea which was tied to my conceptual framework (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

#### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze Black male college students' perceptions of their educational environment and the roles of educational leaders in high school and college. These perceptions were based on the participants' experiences from high school and while attending college. Literature about Black male students has continuously presented the struggles endured that prohibited their ability to attend and achieve in college. Instead of focusing on these struggles, I have chosen to approach this study from a success model to determine the perceptions of successful Black males regarding their educational environment and the role of educational leaders. However, owing to some Black males volunteering information that blended between positive and negative perceptions simultaneously, I included some information related to their deficit thinking and experiences.

This study's findings were based on the results of semi-structured interviews conducted with 21 Black males consisting of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors attending South Western University (SWU). The Black males were not members of intercollegiate athletic teams. The research questions that guided this study included

1. How do Black male college students perceive their educational environments (i.e., high school and college)?

2. How do Black male college students perceive the influence of their educational environments (i.e., high school and college) on their college attendance and achievement?
3. How do Black male college students perceive the influence of educational leaders (i.e., high school and college) on their college attendance and achievement?

### Sample Description

Permission to conduct this study was obtained from SWU. This study was also reviewed and approved through SWU's Institutional Review Board.

As stated in Chapter 3, these participants were selected using a purposive, non-random, homogenous sampling approach (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). By using this approach, I was able to specify certain characteristics of interest in a population. The 21 participants were identified and volunteered to participate in this study. The participants were Black male non-intercollegiate athlete students. These Black male students attended and graduated from high school. All participants except one attended high school in the U.S. In addition, 20 of the 21 Black males were U.S. citizens. One participant had dual citizenship (i.e., U.S. and Western Europe), and one was a citizen of West Africa and had a U.S. Visa.

All of the freshmen were solicited from SWU's New Start Program. The New Start Program was established in 1969 (New Start, 2008) and was a six-week summer bridge program designed to help first-year freshmen succeed in the transition from high school to university life. This program helped students get a head start in college and to

become well rounded by providing student assistance with academics, residence life, orientation, and extracurricular activities. All of the sophomores, juniors, and seniors in this study were solicited via the African American Student Affairs (AASA) listserv, Facebook.com, posting flyers throughout SWU's campus, and soliciting Black males walking on the campus.

Participants' academic majors varied from engineering, business management, and computer science to creative writing and psychology. All of the participants self identified regarding their ethnicities, and all identified with being Black or African American. It was duly noted when a participant included other identity characteristics such as being biracial, multiracial, or born outside of the United States. Last, each participant's interview was conducted in the location requested by the interviewee. However, if the interviewee did not identify a location, I offered my office as a default location or suggested a location they could easily find. As stated in Chapter 3, I wanted to ensure complete comfort for each interviewee. The participants' comfort level was essential to help the interviewees provide useful and essential information. Thus, it was important to note the location of each interview. Although participants were informed that interviews could take up to an hour, the interview times ranged from one-half hour (one freshman interview) to approximately two hours.

An introduction to each participant by class standing is followed by respective Tables 1 to 4. The tables represent a visual of participants' demographical data and background.

### *Introduction of Participants*

The participants were recruited and volunteered to speak about their perceptions of high school and the university. The names used in the following transcriptions are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity promised to each participant.

#### *The Freshman Class*

Alex was an 18 year old freshman, born and raised in a major city in the Southwestern region of the U.S. He had two older siblings (a brother and a sister) and a younger brother. Alex attended a public and private high school and expressed that he always knew he was going to college because of the expectations from his mother. Alex stated, “My mom wanted to me to go to college as she always wanted my brothers and sisters and me to be better than her.” Although Alex’s older brother and sister did not go to college, he viewed himself as the last hope or chance for his family by being a college student because his younger brother was not doing well in school. Alex chose to come to SWU because he did not want to be too far from home. He expressed, “SWU is far enough from home where I can be on my own but close enough to family.”

Reggie was a 19 year old freshman, born in a major city in the Eastern region of the U.S. but moved to a major city in the Southwest when he was 11 years old. Reggie was the oldest of three boys, and both of Reggie’s parents went to college. He attended a public high school and expressed that he always knew he was going to college because of his parents. He explained, “I have always been in a community where going to college was expressed. My family always stressed going to college and told me how important it

was.” Reggie chose to attend SWU because this university was in the same city of where he resided.

Melvin was an 18 year old freshman from a small town in the Southern region of the U.S. and had attended a public high school. Melvin always knew he was going to college because of his mother. During the interview, he reflected on how he saw his mother bouncing back and forth from good and bad jobs and seeing how she struggled to make sure he had everything. Melvin continued expressing his desire to go to college while speaking of his mother. He stated,

If I don’t go to college for myself, I am going to go to college for her. I want to be able to provide for my mother and not having a college degree will make things difficult for me to do that.

Melvin chose to come to SWU because his father lived in the same city where the university was located.

Marvin was an 18 year old freshman from a small town in the Southwestern region of the U.S. He had two older sisters and one younger brother. Marvin attended a public high school and explained that he always knew he was going to college because of his parents. He mentioned, “My parents were my driving force of me attending college. They instilled into me that if I don’t go to college, I won’t be able to get that far in life.” Marvin decided to come to SWU because of the status of the school in comparison to the other universities within his state.

Charles was an 18 year old freshman from a major city in the Southwestern region of the U.S., and he was the oldest of three (two younger sisters). He attended a public high school, and consistent with the other freshmen, he mentioned that he always knew

he was going to college. Charles explained, “I had no choice in the matter of going to college because of my parents.” He stated that his parents continuously expressed the importance of going to college for the betterment of his future. Charles chose to attend SWU because both of his parents attended and graduated from SWU. Charles explained, “Although it was more expensive to attend a university outside of my state, I have been indoctrinated into SWU because this is where my parents graduated.”

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Table 1

*Freshmen Demographics*

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Participant name	Hometown	Age	High school	Class	Major	Self-identified ethnicity
Alex	Southwestern region, big city	18	Public to Private	Fresh	Business management	Black or African American
Reggie	Southwestern region, big city	19	Public	Fresh	Undecided- Psychology or sociology	Black and White
Melvin	Southern region, small town	18	Public	Fresh	Engineering	Black
Marvin	Southwestern region, small town	18	Public	Fresh	Undecided- Something in the science field	African American or Black
Charles	Southwestern region, big city	18	Public	Fresh	Computer Science	Black

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*The Sophomore Class*

Harold was a 19 year old sophomore who was born in a major city in the Midwestern region of the U.S. but spent 14 years in the Northeastern region of the U.S.,

and he had a younger sister. Harold attended a public high school and expressed that he always knew he was going to college because of his parents. He stated, "My parents made going to college a priority; yet, I wanted to attend college too." Harold originally planned to go to a private school to play baseball; however, after being injured, he chose to attend SWU because of the weather and the opportunity to be around more people than at a private school.

Jimmy was a 19 year old sophomore who grew up in Western Europe but traveled to the U.S. for a college education. Jimmy attended a private high school and stated that even if he did not know he was going to college, his parents knew he was going. He explained, "Even if I didn't want to, my parents would have gotten me into the college. There was no choice in the matter of me going to college." Jimmy chose SWU because his parents owned property in the same city as the university.

Horace was a 19 year old sophomore, born in a major city in the Northeastern region of the U.S., but he grew up in a major city in the Southwestern region. Horace attended a public high school, and he always knew he was going to college because of his parents. Horace explained, "My parents always told me I was going to college. Everybody in my family has either tried or finished college. It was kind of a family obligation or family tradition." Horace chose to attend SWU because it was in the town where he was raised.

Robert was a 19 year old sophomore from a small town in the Southwestern region of the U.S., and he had an older sister. He attended a public high school and unlike the previously discussed participants, Robert's parents did not have a major influence on

his college attendance. Robert did not start thinking about college until he got to high school. He explained,

My mom was focused on high school being too hard for me. However, after starting my freshman year in high school, I got to that point where I knew I can do this. So my mind was looking towards progression, and I was looking forward to thinking about the next level and started getting a determination of lasting in college.

Robert chose to attend SWU because it was far enough from his home to allow him to be independent, and his sister was attending the same university.

Colin was a 19 year old sophomore, born and raised in a major city in the Southwestern region of the U.S., and he had a brother and a younger sister. He attended a public high school and attending college was something that Colin always knew he would do.

Going to college was not a choice, it was mandatory. When I was 12, my mother made me list my top college choices, and I had to receive information on them monthly. So, I knew from a young age, I was going to college.

Originally, Colin chose to attend SWU because of its athletics program; however, he was no longer an intercollegiate athlete and was now focused on his education.

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Table 2

*Sophomore Demographics*

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Participant name	Hometown	Age	High school	Class	Major	Self-identified ethnicity
Harold	Northeastern region, small town	19	Public	Soph.	Pre-business	Black

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Table 2. Cont.

*Sophomore Demographics*


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Jimmy	Western Europe	19	Private	Soph.	Theatre arts	Black and British
Horace	Southwestern region, major city	19	Public	Soph.	Creative writing	Black or African American
Robert	Southwestern region, major city	19	Public	Soph.	Psychology	Black and Asian
Colin	Southwestern region, major city	19	Public	Soph.	Business marketing	Black, German, and Italian

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*The Junior Class*

Ronny was a 19 year old junior, born and raised in a major city in the Southwestern region of the U.S., and he had a younger sister. Ronny attended a public high school and explained that he knew he was going to college because no one told him he could not. Ronny stated,

I wanted to play football in college so I began making plans to attend college. As an athlete when you are younger, people expect you to go to college and play football. So, that is what I wanted to do.

Ronny also stated he knew he was going to college because of his parents. He explained, “My parents wanted me to go to college. Both of them went to college, and if they went to college, they expect you to.” Ronny chose to attend SWU because of its athletics program; however, he was no longer an intercollegiate athlete and was now focused on his education.

Keith is a 20 year old junior, born in a small town in the Southern region of the U.S., raised mostly in a major city of the Southern region of the U.S., and had a younger step-sister. Keith attended a public high school and always knew he was going to college because his mother instilled this in him at an early age. He expressed, “My mother told me that if I do anything, I need to go to college and get an education and get a degree as that is the most important of all.” Also, Keith wanted to go to college because he wanted a career and to start a family and felt he could not achieve these goals without a degree. Keith, similar to Charles, chose to attend SWU because his mother graduated from this university.

Jason was a 20 year old junior, born and raised in a major city in the Western region of the U.S., and he had a younger brother. Similar to Keith, Jason attended a public high school and always knew he was going to college because his parents instilled this in him at a very early age; however, Jason said it was not mandatory. He explained, “My parents stated education was very important, and although they wanted me to go to college, they didn’t force me to.” Jason chose to attend SWU because this university offered the most academic scholarships. In addition, he was very adamant about leaving his home state. He stated, “I really wanted to leave my home state to assert my independence because I have been there pretty much all of my life.”

Wayne was a 20 year old junior, born in a major city in the Northeastern region of the U.S., grew up in a major city of the Midwestern and Southwestern regions of the U.S., and had six siblings (three brothers and three sisters). Wayne attended two public high schools and expressed never having a doubt about going to college. He stated,

“From childhood, I knew I was going to college. In my freshman year of high school, I wasn’t concerned about whether or not I was going to college; it was the focus of where I was going to go.” Wayne chose to attend SWU because he wanted to stay within the same state but wanted to be at least a 100 miles away home.

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Table 3

*Junior Demographics*

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Participant name	Hometown	Age	High school	Class	Major	Self-identified ethnicity
Ronny	Southwestern region, major city	19	Public	Junior	Creative writing	Black, Russian, and White
Keith	Southern region, small Town and major city	20	Public	Junior	Pre-business	African American or Black
Jason	Western region, major city	20	Public	Junior	Psychology/ English	Black and African American
Wayne	Midwestern region, major city, and southwestern region, major city	20	Public	Junior	Spanish	Black

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*The Senior Class*

Cameron was a 21 year old senior, born and raised in a major city in the Midwestern region of the U.S., and unlike the majority of Black males in this study, he

was an only child. Cameron attended public and private high schools and stated that he knew he was going to college. Cameron explained,

I don't come from that much of a wealthy family. I didn't know I had money to go to college until I was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. My grandfather died when I was probably 8 years old, and in his will, he said he would pay for my education.

Cameron stated that both he and his mother wanted him to get out of the Midwestern region. Cameron wanted a good university on his resume and chose SWU.

Kurt was a 21 year old senior, born in a small city in the Southern region of the U.S., raised in a major city in the Southwestern region of the U.S., and had two older siblings (brother and sister) and one younger sister. Kurt attended a public high school and knew he was going to attend college because of his father.

He explained,

My father made the decision that I was going to go to college because he had it rough growing up. He is one of 8 siblings and had to join the military. He didn't want that for us so he pushed education from day one.

Kurt chose to attend SWU because it was kind to home but not too close. He said he had a scholarship to attend SWU and would be able to experience different cultures there.

Paul was a 21 year old senior who was born in Western Europe, grew up in the Southern and Southwestern regions of the U.S., and had one older brother and sister. Paul attended a public high school and in his mind, it was known that he would attend college. He stated, "Financially wise, I never really had any problems. My mother is a doctor and my father is a translator and both have graduate degrees. Going to college was something that was always assumed."

Jarvis was a 22 year old senior, born and raised in a major city in the Southwestern region of the U.S. He had two sisters. Jarvis attended a private high school and expressed not having any options other than going to college. He stated, “My dad from a very young age instilled in me that college was the only way to go. There were no other options as long as I was living under his roof.” Jarvis chose to attend SWU because he had received grants and scholarships to attend this university.

Huey was a 23 year old senior, born and raised in West Africa. He had three brothers and one sister. Huey attended a private high school in West Africa and attended a public high school when he came to the U.S. Huey expressed having no doubts about going to college. He mentioned, “I wanted to do some great things and reach great heights. To reach these heights, I have to climb a ladder, an academic ladder.” Huey decided to attend SWU because of scholarships. He explained, “I had choices to go to other schools; however, SWU gave the most money.”

Desmond was a 22 year old senior, born and raised in a major city in the Western region of the U.S., who had a younger brother. Desmond attended a public high school, and unlike the majority of the participants, he did not know he was going to attend college. He expressed,

Education wasn't really installed in my brain. I was lucky because my parents could always explain to me from history as in they were never educated and the life we lived with them being uneducated was a complete struggle.

Desmond decided to attend SWU because he wanted to leave his home state. He stated,

I grew up in a pretty bad area, and I didn't want to go to school in my state. Yet, I didn't want to jump the gun and go that far away because I kind of got intimidated. I knew if I went to SWU, it would be a little step away but a big enough step to where I want to be.

Jasper was a 25 year old senior from a major city in the Midwestern region of the U.S. He had a younger brother and sister. Jasper attended a public high school and stated that it was a given that he was going to college. He expressed, “I came from a family in which everyone did go to college. For example, my dad is a doctor and my granddad is a doctor. With everybody going to college, it was expected.” Jasper attended different universities before coming to SWU. He left previous institutions for financial reasons and also because he wanted to experience a different culture. Although SWU was an expensive school, living in this city was not costly for Jasper. He explained, “Since my parents were helping me, I wanted to make it easy on them as far as my living expenses.”

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Table 4

*Senior Demographics*

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Participant name	Hometown	Age	High school	Class	Major	Self-identified ethnicity
Cameron	Midwestern region, major city	21	Public and private	Senior	Engineering	Black White
Kurt	Southwestern region, major city	21	Public	Senior	Physiology	African American or Black
Paul	Southern region, small city	21	Public	Senior	Nutritional science	Black, White, Western Europe

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Table 4 Cont.

*Senior Demographics*


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Jarvis	Southwestern region, major city	22	Private	Senior	Political science	Black
Huey	West Africa	23	Private and public	Senior	Political science	Black African American from Ghana
Desmond	Western region, major city	22	Public	Senior	Physiology and Molecular and Cellular biology	African American
Jasper	Midwestern region, major city	25	Public	Senior	Physiology	Black

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*Summary of Participants*

The 21 participants came from different regions of the U.S. and the world, had different family backgrounds, and were enrolled in or considering different majors. From the 21 participants, 85% attended public high schools. The majority of these Black males knew that college was in their future. Of the 21 Black males, 95% knew they were going to attend college. Last, 85% of the 21 Black males expressed a family member's influence on their decision to attend college. Although the participants represented a homogenous sample (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) the demographic information did not represent a monolithic group (Harper, 2006) of Black Male students attending SWU. The Black males in the sample represented a diverse group in which individuals self-

identified within Black culture, came from different family backgrounds and high school experiences, and made different choices about college majors. More differences in their journeys are revealed in the following descriptive findings.

### Descriptive Findings

As previously discussed, I immersed myself in the data and relied on my interpretations by using the grounded theory approach. Following qualitative methods, the data from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed. The breadth, depth, and richness of the information obtained from these interviews were enormous. For the purpose of this study, I created categories from the emerged themes that best reflected commonality of the nature of substance in line with the research questions and literature for presenting the data. After analyzing and coding all interviews, the findings resulted in four major themes:

1. Positive perceptions of the high school and college educational environments.
2. Negative perceptions of the high school and college educational environments.
3. Positive perceptions of the educational leaders in high school and college.
4. Negative perceptions of educational leaders in high school and college.

Within these themes, categories were constructed to help analyze these Black males positive and negative perceptions. Within the positive perceptions of the educational environment, the participants perceived their environments through these categories: Status of School, Diversity, and Being Comfortable, which are defined below.

*Status of School* was the esteem and/or respect for the school.

*Diversity* was the exposure to different cultures, different people from different backgrounds.

*Being Comfortable* was being around other African Americans, feeling welcomed by folks other than African Americans, or helping to create an environment that is fit their individual needs.

In addition, the participants perceived the influence of educational environments on their attendance and achievement in college through these categories: College Preparatory, The Push Factor, and Self-Assertion. The categories are defined as follows.

*College Preparatory* was a high school environment that expected good grades, gave consistent messages about going to college, and provided programs geared towards college.

*The Push Factor* was an environment that pushed students towards being academically successful and to attend college (Rodriguez, 2008).

*Self-Assertion* was taking what an environment offered and going beyond opportunities or lack of opportunities that were given.

Along with the positive perceptions of these Black males and the influence of their educational leaders to attend and achieve in college, the participants perceived the leaders through these categories: The Push Factor, College Success, and Constructive Leaders. These categories are defined as follows.

*The Push Factor* was defined above.

*College Success* reflected leaders setting higher expectations and providing tools to be successful in college.

*Constructive Leaders* were authentic and informative, providing assistance and being more than a teacher (Rodriguez, 2008).

In conjunction with these positive perceptions, these Black males had negative perceptions to share about their environments and leaders. Within the negative perceptions of the educational environments, the participants' perceptions were based on these categories: Being Stereotyped as Being Black, Not Being Able to Relate, Cliques, and Lack of Diversity. These categories are defined below.

*Being Stereotyped as Being Black* was about not "fitting" others' expectations of a Black person (Stephan, 1999).

*Not being Able to Relate* was about the characteristics and socioeconomic status of the school.

*Cliques* were people grouped together by student organization, status, or race.

*Lack of Diversity* indicated a lack of Black people or minorities.

Within the negative perceptions regarding how Black males perceived the influence of their educational environments in attending and achieving in college, the participants' perceptions were based on these categories: Lack of School Resources and The Need to Impress. These categories are defined as below.

*Lack of School Resources* was the school or school facilities that did not promote academics.

*The Need to Impress* was proving you were not lethargic or uneducated.

Last, the negative perceptions from Black males on the influence of educational leaders to attend and achieve in college were based on the category of Destructive Leaders.

*Deconstructive Leaders* reflected those who had no sense of caring, were very robotic, and were only interested in collecting a paycheck.

In the next section, information shared by the Black males is arranged by the above themes and categories and is illustrated under each research question posed by this study.

#### Research Question 1

How do Black male college students perceive their educational environments (i.e., high school and college)?

##### *Positive Perceptions of High School Environment*

The participants conversed about their perceptions of high school, and some perceived their environment as positive. The perceptions were positive because of the status of their school, diversity, and being comfortable. Each category is discussed further below.

*Status of the school.* The responses for Research Question 1 were examined to ascertain how the participants perceived their high school environment. During this analysis, I determined a commonality among the participants' perceptions. Their perceptions were geared towards the esteem of their school and the resources their schools had to offer. Although these participants experienced different high school

environments in different regions, they expressed similar positive perceptions regarding their high school environment.

Harold attended a public school in the Northeastern region of the U.S. and perceived his school as a highly respected and popular school. Harold explained,

My high school was a public school, but it was rated in the top 10 in the nation for public schools. At my high school, about 98% of the people that graduated went to college. My school was financially well off, and people would move to this district just to go to this high school.

Harold mentioned that in addition to his parents pushing him to go to college, seeing people in his high school go to college also played a role. Harold perceived his high school as an environment where academics were a top priority.

Jasper expressed similar perceptions of his high school. Jasper attended high school in the Midwestern region of the U.S. and stated his high school was one of the most respected and well received high schools in the city. He asserted,

Our school was interesting. It was about 50% Black with extremely smart Black students along with everybody else being smart. It was a magnet public school in which you had to test into. It was the second best public school in the city. We took standardized tests once a month too because we set the standards for public schools. They wanted to see what we were learning at the time and our level of education because we were a standard based school. Our school was harder than college.

Jasper expressed that his high school environment was strictly about academics. He commented that even though he came from a family in which everybody went to college, his high school shaped the students' minds about going to college.

Although Kurt did not express similar views as Harold and Jasper regarding their schools being in the top 10 of the nation or their cities, he did state his high school was a magnet school and also very well known. Kurt attended high school in the Southwestern

region of the U.S. in a military town with an army base. He explained that because it was a military town, there were many different students coming in and leaving his high school. Kurt shared,

My high school was a good school; it was a magnet school. It was one of the best schools at the time when I was going there. It was one of the best in the city; I am not sure about the state. When I went there, we were listed in the top 100 high schools in America.

Kurt, Harold, and Jasper attended public high schools and perceived their environments with high regard because of their school's status and recognition. They explained their environments were strictly about focusing on academics. Unlike Kurt, Harold, and Jasper, Jarvis attended a private high school in the Southwestern Region of the U.S.

Jarvis attended a private high school for four years. He shared that he attended public schools prior to attending high school; however, he explained that his previous middle school environment was filled with trouble such as gangs and fights. He expressed the importance of leaving his previous environment and attending this private high school. Jarvis stated,

When I was promoted from middle school, I was supposed to be going to a high school that had the lowest academic standards in the state. So my dad said, you know, in keeping with your college plan, we need to get you into a better school environment, and you are going to one of three private schools. We ended up deciding on going to Best High School. Best High School is not by name but by reputation a college preparatory private school which tries as much as they can to veer you to go to college.

Jarvis explained being thankful for going to this private school in comparison to the original school he was supposed to attend. Jarvis realized the original school he was scheduled to attend would have caused academic problems, and he envisioned having hard times in this school. Along with Jasper, Alex attended a private school.

Alex attended two high schools in the Southwestern region of the U.S. He completed his freshman year at a public high school and completed the rest of his high school years at a private school. Alex elaborated on his perceptions regarding both high schools:

I liked my first high school; it was a public school. I went to school with people I grew up in my neighborhood which made it more comfortable, easier, and I didn't have to compare myself to anyone. When I got to my second high school, the private school, I noticed it was very structured. My counselors and teachers told me what I needed to do, how much I needed to study, and what GPA I needed as well. This was a school that wanted you to go to college. This was quite different than what I was used to.

These Black males perceived their high schools as an environment geared towards college. Yet, Huey expressed a similar perception of his high school but from an international perspective.

Huey attended an all-male boarding high school in West Africa. Unlike the other participants, Huey attended high school outside of the U.S. Huey spoke with great excitement and admiration regarding his positive perceptions of his high school. He cherished his school:

I went to a very great school back in Africa; it was a very prestigious high school. There was no way that I wasn't going to go to college. It was highly competitive, and the best kids from around the country were there. There was so much competition to do well. You have to do well. You have to study, you have to be here at this time, and so forth. It was very structured. You have to dress this way, you have to be on time to the dining hall, you have to be on time to go to sleep, and so forth. It was much more like military like in terms of the way they treated us. But yet, I thought it prepared you for life as it made you responsible. You were at the state where you are not depending on your parents anymore. There is no one there to tell you to do certain things. You have to do it yourself, and if you don't, someone is going to hold you responsible. So, it molded me. It became a place of preparation for college and the real life.

These Black males perceived their high schools as environments with high rankings and prestigious status. Their perceptions were notable because although they came from different environments, they perceived their high school environments in similar fashions. Along with these positive perceptions, some of the participants perceived their high school environments as resourceful. Some of the Black males explained how their schools provided different and useful resources for their academic success.

Horace shared his perceptions of his high school environment by describing it compared to other schools. He attended high school in the Southwestern U.S. and was proud to be a recipient of some of the resources his school had to offer. He expressed these perceptions about his high school:

You have a lot of resources at my high school. My high school offered a lot of classes that weren't provided in other high schools. For example, they provided a Physics class, and they don't really offer this in most other schools. They also had the African American literature class. That was a new course that was started a year ago or so, and it started here first before any other school.

Horace explained that along with his family's expectation to attend college, his perceptions of his high school helped influence his decision to attend college. It is important to note that Horace's high school was across the street from SWU. Horace mentioned that seeing the university daily created a realistic environment regarding going to college. Horace expressed that seeing the university every day made it feel as if college was at his fingertips. Wayne shared a similar perception regarding his school.

Unlike Horace, Wayne attended two public high schools in the Southwestern region of the U.S. transferring from one public high school to another. In contrast, Alex

and Jarvis attended public schools and then transferred to private schools. Nonetheless, Wayne spoke of positive perceptions regarding both high schools.

I thought we were one of the better high schools which made it that much better. When people would find out that I go to Seasons High or Willow Bend High, they would say you all have so many programs. And that was the truth. I took this AP [Advanced Placement] Spanish class that wasn't offered at a lot of schools. This opened up more opportunities for me to do than what maybe somebody at an older or lesser high school could do. Just knowing that your high school is more technologically advanced in the area and having this many courses, we had that many more opportunities, and it made it that much easier for me to do what I want to do.

Wayne explained that both of his high schools offered opportunities which he believed he would not have received at a lesser high school. He explained that because of his opportunities in high school, he was now majoring in Spanish at SWU. Cameron shared a similar perception regarding what his school was able to offer.

Cameron attended private and public high schools in the Midwestern region of the U.S. Although Cameron did not express many positive attributes about his public school, he had this to say about his private school:

The private high school was more of a student teacher attention than the public high other school. There were like 1,500 students in the public high school, and the private school had 400. At the private high school, they made you study. Because of this school, I was able to develop good study habits.

These Black males perceived their high school environments as positive due to the esteem and resources the schools had to offer. Also, these Black males attended public and private high schools, and the majority had positive perceptions regarding their schools. Although these Black males viewed their schools as positive through a status and resource perspective, some of the participants viewed their high school from a positive diversity perspective.

*A Diversity Perspective.* As mentioned previously, each participant attended different high schools in different regions, yet some of these Black males appreciated the diversity within their schools.

Marvin attended a public high school in the Southwestern U.S. He was quick to say that his high school exposed him to different people from different backgrounds. He continued with his perceptions:

My high school was pretty diverse. There were a pretty fair amount of Whites there, but there were also a couple of Blacks, Native Americans, Asian Americans like Filipinos, and Latinos. Considering how diverse my school was, that had an effect on me; I was able to see the different cultures at the school. The high school environment affected me from a culture aspect as it exposed me to different people.

Marvin noted that his high school prepared him for college from a cultural standpoint because in college, he interacted with different people from different backgrounds.

Marvin admitted that his high school had more of an impact on him with regard to diversity than academics. Wayne shared the same perception.

Wayne was very excited to talk about the diversity within both of his schools. He spoke about what he witnessed especially coming from the Midwest. He commented,

There were so many different people in high school. Like in the Midwest you either have a bunch of Black people and a couple White people and maybe a few Mexican people. But out here, you have White people, you have Mexican people, you have Black people, you have Asian people. You have a lot of different diversity here.

Wayne explained that he appreciated leaving the Midwest and moving to the Southwest. He perceived his environment as more engaging because of the different cultures and also commented on how moving to the Southwest helped him practice his Spanish. He was able to practice with someone every day and was almost fluent in Spanish.

Ronny shared his positive perceptions regarding the cultural characteristics of his high school. Ronny attended a public high school and was also quick to state that his school was diverse; yet, he also spoke from a socio-economical standpoint. Ronny continued,

It was pretty diverse at my high school. The majority was Hispanic but we had a good amount of Whites and Blacks. It was a magnet school meaning that people from all over the city could come in. It didn't matter where you came from if you were at the school. You had people coming from rich and poor parts of the town and you just mingled with them. It was pretty cool.

Having a diverse environment in high school was important to these Black males. This diversity component exposed the participants to a variety of different people and helped prepare them for college and beyond. Each participant spoke of being appreciative of his high school environment because they saw some similarity within the college environment. In addition, the diverse environment is sometimes a factor in helping people feel comfortable.

*Being comfortable.* Some of the Black males commented on how being comfortable in their environment helped them to relate to other students. Some Black male participants felt comfortable being around everyone, but others felt more comfortable being around other African Americans. Alex expressed his perception of being around other African Americans from his public high school and his private school.

At my first school, I grew up with people from my neighborhood so things were comfortable and easier there. I was always around African Americans. When I got to my second high school, the private school, there were no more than like 15 other African Americans. So, it was a little weird not being around a good amount of African Americans. So, I mostly stuck to them and was like more or less associates to the other races.

Alex established his comfort zone by associating with the few African Americans at his private school. On the other hand, Wayne experienced something different at his high schools. Wayne spoke about his perception from a general cultural perspective as opposed to race.

Wayne moved from the Midwest and began his high school years in the Southwest, where he felt more comfortable. Wayne explained,

In my freshman year, it was different, it was new. That is when my attitude and mind preference completely switched from being in the Midwest and now being in the Southwest. Life was so much easier here. I just fell in love with people from the Southwest; they are less judgmental people. Like in the Midwest, they would tease you if you had a Wal-Mart shirt or if you had on Payless shoes. Here, nobody cares. No one ever mentions anything like that. My high school years were easy not having to worry about being judged.

Wayne explained that in the Southwest, he was in a culture that seemed to welcome everyone. Cameron shared his own perception of being comfortable at his private school.

Cameron noted when he was a freshman at his first high school, he admitted it was the first time he had attended a public school.

I think I was more comfortable at my private school. I got along with the Black folks at the other school, but at the first school, the public school, I didn't know anyone. All these people were from the same school district; I mean I probably knew about three people from the football team. I really didn't socialize with that many people outside of the community.

Cameron explained that if he had known more people in his public school, things could have been better. These Black males appreciated the diversity of their environments, but some felt the need to create or establish a culture of their own.

Melvin attended a public high school in the Southern region of the U.S. He commented that most of the students were rich and White. However, Melvin spoke with great pride about starting a trend within his high school for other Black males.

I started a fraternity in my high school, and it was called Beta Phi Theta. The meaning of this fraternity stood for Brothers Progressing Together, and all we wanted to do was to be a group of young Black brothers that wanted to start a club because the Black males in our schools were heading in the wrong direction. All we wanted to do was give them an opportunity and to help ourselves, teach ourselves, and teach them about the things we should be doing in life like going to college. It would be little things down to the way we dressed. Every week I would be like, we are going to dress up different like we might wear a shirt and tie today or just might wear something to be in unity where we would wear all black this week or all wear suspenders and a bow tie. We wanted to dress and act in different ways that made us stand out so that people would know; hey I am not like everybody else.

This club received a lot of attention, and other people began wearing similar clothing or wanting to participate in the club. Robert shared a very similar perception of setting trends in high school.

Robert attended a public high school in the Southwestern U.S. and perceived his environment to be relatable to others; however, Robert felt the need to branch out on his own. He stated,

In my freshman year, I just pretty much; I used to just hang around the people that I went to middle school with. I started playing sports, and that is what developed my social status with people. I just hung around them and kicked it with them. In my junior year, I started not to care because of the people I was hanging with. My father then told me that sometimes you have to walk alone to do what you have to do which still happens today. Sometimes when you walk alone, others will follow. My point is that my junior year is when I became my own person. There was this trend that I set in my junior year. I think it was the beginning of 2006; I just set this trend that I felt like dressing up every Friday. I was wearing ties, button up shirts, slacks, and some Stacey Adams. Some people began to follow, and my friends began doing this as well. This was what I created.

Robert explained that sometimes before you can get along with others, you have to understand who you are and where you are coming from. When he began to walk alone, he was able to truly relate to others.

The status of the school, the diversity perspective, and being comfortable were the positive perceptions of the Black male participants regarding their high school environment. These Black males perceived their environments as constructive which played roles in their collegiate years. On the other hand, some of these Black males viewed their environments from a negative perspective.

#### *Negative Perceptions of High School Environment*

Some of the participants also voiced negative perceptions of their high school environment. Their perceptions were negative because of the stereotype of being Black and not being able to relate. Each category is discussed further below.

*Stereotype of being Black.* Similar to the positive perceptions of these Black male participants, I identified a commonality among their negative perceptions. Again, these participants experienced different high school environments in different regions; yet, they expressed similar negative perceptions regarding their high school environments.

Interestingly, some of the categories from the positive perceptions of the high school environment related to the negative perceptions.

Reggie noted that there was a small number of Black students in his high school. He attended a public high school in the Southwest and perceived that the lack of Black people in his school was led to the stereotyping by other students. He commented,

The people tended to judge Black people at the school because there were no Black people in the school. They assumed you should be playing football or

basketball. And if you don't play these sports, you are not Black enough. This was from a White person's perspective as it was mostly White. You rarely saw a Black student. I was like the only one out of like 10 students, maybe 20 but there were no more than that.

Reggie knew this stereotype had existed for many years; however, it became apparent to him when he realized these stereotypes were being applied to him. Reggie commented on being the recipient of the "You are not Black enough" comments because he did not play basketball or football. Charles expressed similar perceptions of his high school environment.

Charles also attended a public high school in the Southwestern U.S. and expressed his disappointment with the stereotyping he saw at his high school. Charles asserted,

It was kind of annoying because you would always get the, you are the only Black kid, and you are supposed to be like this, or you are supposed to rap and shoot people from the B.E.T. [Black Entertainment Television] perspective. It was kind of annoying. You would get the Black jokes, and it would get annoying after a while. The students were basing Black people from B.E.T., and it was ridiculous.

Charles expressed that he stuck close to his group of friends, friends who identified with being a minority. He posited that his friends helped in dealing with these negative stereotypes and ignorant rich White students. Cameron commented on similar perceptions as Reggie and Charles from his school in the Midwest but felt he had to address these stereotypes in a different way.

Cameron felt the need to disprove people in his high school. He explained that he didn't want to be viewed as a Black male who could not amount to anything. Cameron stated,

In my high school, the private school, you felt like you had to act different all the time and like you couldn't be yourself and stuff. You kind of felt like you had to prove them wrong and stuff. You had to prove their perceptions wrong of them

thinking that you are just a Black male that can't do anything. That is what I felt like. I remember I felt as if I had to always prove them wrong.

Cameron did not want to be portrayed in a stereotypical fashion and tried to change others' perceptions by completing the necessary work on time and keeping his grades up.

Cameron and Paul perceived their environments similarly, and Paul's statements also related to those of Charles and Reggie.

Paul also spoke of being stereotyped by Black people as well. Paul attended a public high school in the Southwestern U.S. and explained his perceptions regarding Black and non-Black students:

The thing about attending my high school in the Southwest, that made it more weird, a lot of people there had a lot of stereotypes about how a Black person should be, and I didn't really fit them all. I wasn't athletic; I was not singing and dancing like Usher [Rhythm and Blues artist] or anything like that. So I didn't fit their expectations so that didn't really help me at all. Yet, the funniest thing about it was that the people that I couldn't get along with the most were the Black people there. It was like because I didn't fit their stereotypes, because I wasn't like them, and I kind of thought of them to be really snobbish. Even though White people ignored me there, but the few of the Black people, I really could not stand them at all.

Paul expressed that this was something he had experienced on numerous occasions. Due to his biracial ethnicity, he never really felt he belonged to any group. Nonchalantly, Paul explained that this was what he expected from people (Whites and Blacks) wherever he went. Huey shared a similar perception regarding Blacks when he moved from West Africa to the U.S.

Huey came from West Africa where everyone was Black, and in his school, everyone was male. When he moved to the U.S., Huey was looking forward to being welcomed but experienced something different; different because of his perception of

Blacks in America and Black American's perceptions regarding Blacks coming from Africa. He commented,

While in Africa, from my perspective, we tended to view Blacks in America from the hip-hop/B.E.T. culture. I believe this is because this was all that we saw and knew. So when I came to America, of course I really didn't see that. When I came to America, I was looking forward to interacting with the Blacks here; however, it didn't happen that way. They didn't want to interact with me as I had to conform or act like them in order to be accepted. Yes, I looked like them but yet I was different.

A close friend Huey met in high school in the U.S. explained that he had to assimilate to Black Americans because he was from a different culture. Huey explained that it was very uncomfortable for him when he came to his public high school because he was always by himself; he would not interact with Black Americans, and Black Americans would not interact with him.

Some of these Black males perceived their high school environment as one in which stereotypes of Blacks depicted who they were supposed to be. Some were annoyed and angry with this depiction, and others chose to prove these stereotypes wrong. Interestingly, some of these participants perceived other Blacks stereotyping them as well because they did not "fit" certain expectations or were just different from them. Being in such an environment can make people feel as if they cannot relate to others. Some of the Black male participants discussed not being able to relate to others, yet they spoke from a perception of not fitting the norm or a socioeconomic status.

*Not Being Able to Relate.* Some of the participants commented on how their environments made it difficult for them to relate to others. This difficulty was due to the characteristics and socioeconomic status of the school.

Jimmy attended a private high school in West Europe and spoke in slight anger about his perceptions of the environment. He shared his disdain for his school because of what his school was trying to portray, and all of the work he was trying to do for the school was not being well received. Jimmy stated,

My high school was trying to uphold this image of the classic British private school, and it wasn't happening. First of all, it's a nationally and ethnically integrated school which is a step in the wrong direction. They had all of these crazy kids. I was very frustrated with the school because they supported and advocated the kids that were doing things that were ruining their image. I was doing a lot of stuff for the school like getting events and fundraisers going, getting the house involved in the events. All of these good works. I was often criticized and ridiculed by my teachers and peers and didn't get recognition. I believe this was because I was eccentric and different. I was outspoken and a little bit rebellious and just different all together. I wasn't fitting the image that they wanted. And as a result, I strongly believe I was not one of their top students or poster child that they supported. But I didn't want to be a poster child, I just wanted to be appreciated for the stuff I did because I did a lot of great stuff.

While listening to Jimmy, you could hear in his voice that he was still upset about some of his high school perceptions. Jimmy did not relate to the students and teachers.

Therefore, he felt organizing different events and programs would help; however, he experienced the opposite. Interestingly, Robert mentioned earlier a similar approach in being alone on dressing up on Fridays, which people began to emulate. Melvin also mentioned starting a club for Black males in his school that was well received. Yet, Jimmy tried similar approaches which were not accepted by the students or teachers. He explained that this was what prompted him to go to college in the U.S. Cameron also spoke about not being able to relate, but his perspective was from a socioeconomic standpoint.

Cameron explained that his private school was quite expensive to attend. He was able to attend this school because it was a provision of grandfather's will. Cameron believed that his family was in the lower middle class, but most of the students in his school were well into the upper class. Cameron had this to say about why he felt he could not relate in his school:

I didn't feel like I belonged because everybody at the school had like super nice cars and huge houses. I never had seen a house where it was huge, like a mansion. These kids had super money, like half a million dollar houses. I never sat in like a lower deck at sporting events, the decks where it costs a lot of money to sit. When I was with my friends, they let me sit down there with them. It was something that I wasn't used to, and I couldn't do these things or have these things in which they have.

Cameron also shared that when he saw the status of these students, he felt a little embarrassed by what his family had to offer in comparison to the other students.

I really didn't want anyone to come to my house because there wouldn't be nothing to do at my house in comparison to the other houses I was seeing. I won't lie, I was kind of embarrassed of my house, and I didn't want anyone to see my house. I didn't want to be judged or compared to what they had.

Cameron now looks back and is thankful for what his family had to offer at the time. He explained that things could have been worse and only wished he could have been as appreciative then as he is now. Interestingly, Wayne spoke about being comfortable and being able to relate in his environment because he felt he was not being judged. No one seemed to care about a person's status. Unfortunately for Cameron, students did care or acknowledged the status of others. Reggie shared a different perspective that was not mentioned by Cameron or Jimmy. Reggie spoke from the perception of not being able to relate because no one looked like him.

Reggie commented earlier on the paucity of Black students in his high school, which played into the stereotypes of Black people as athletes. Reggie explained,

I didn't play basketball or football. I played lacrosse. Since this was a city league, there were other Black people on the team, but from my school, I was the only one. Just like in my classes, I was the only one. Throughout my high school years, I only had one other Black student in my class. I wasn't able to relate to anyone, and I felt alone. But the other kids were nice. I am not going to say that they were mean, but I did feel alone. I felt alone especially when we talked about topics such as race.

The positive and negative perceptions of these Black males are worthy of attention. These participants were from different high schools in different locations, yet they perceived their educational environments in similar perspectives. The type of high school, student population, and location were key factors into their perceptions.

Importantly, what seemed to be a positive for some Black males was perceived as a negative by other Black males. When Black males are enrolled at the same university, some of their perceptions were consistent with the perceptions of the educational environments from high school, and some perceptions were different.

#### *Positive Perceptions of College Environment*

The participants elaborated on their perceptions by discussing the college environment. Some of the participants conveyed positive perceptions of their college environment due to the presence of diversity. This category is discussed further below.

*A diversity perspective.* The responses for Research Question 1 were examined to determine how the participants perceived their college environment. Some Black males perceived their college environment from a positive diverse perspective as some

perceived their high school environment. Reggie quickly noticed the difference from his high school environment to his college environment.

Reggie commented earlier about being one of the few Black students in his high school and being stereotyped by students in his school. However, he noticed a different environment in college:

I think the college environment is an improvement for me. It is definitely more diverse from where I came from. I think people are more open and outgoing. Although it is still mostly White here, but there are also more Black students here from where I came from. I think that is a good thing. I still think we need some more Black students here because at this school we are a big minority on this campus.

Reggie recognized that more Black students were needed in his college environment. Yet, considering where Reggie came from, he was very appreciative of being in an environment that was more diverse. Huey shared a similar perspective of appreciating a diverse environment in college.

Huey explained earlier that his high school in Africa was all male and all Black. Because Reggie came from an all-White school, he was looking forward to seeing more African Americans in college. Conversely, Huey was looking forward to experiencing different people from different backgrounds. Huey spoke with great passion and admiration about being able to experience different people from different cultures.

It's very, very diverse here in college. You know back home we were all Black. We had the light skinned and the really dark ones too. We had different tribes and people from all over. But over here, the population within itself is different, very, very different, different people from different cultures and backgrounds. I think that is one thing that I do appreciate is that I can be in an environment where there are people from all walks of life. You have an opportunity to interact with different people on a daily basis that shapes your perceptions about life and about people. It doesn't really make you close minded because it is very easy to get stuck in your own wall when you have the same people around you. Back home,

you have nothing but people from my area so there is no desire to explore others and understand their perspectives. Since I have left my country and I am here and you have White people, Mexican people, Asians, and you have Blacks and Africans so it is a different culture to me, but I can have great friends within all of them within this population of diverse people, I have great friends that I can learn from. It makes me think differently about people, and it makes me a better person so I know how to relate to this person and how to relate to that person in a way that it will not offend someone to some extent.

Huey stated that he had interacted with different people throughout college and was glad he had received the opportunity to come to the U.S. for college. He continued to state that interacting with other cultures was one of the biggest benefits of being at SWU. Wayne asserted similar statements, but spoke from a general perspective.

Wayne explained that being in college was being a part of one culture, an open and accepting culture. In college, people rarely judge each other because they are open to new experiences. Wayne's perceptions of his high school environment were similar to his college environment. He stated,

When you come to college, it's a free world, and nobody is going to say nothing because they are open to new experiences. And that's what college is about, especially when you live on campus. That is one thing I was able to pick up on; you are kind of in an open environment where you are able to feel more comfortable with myself. I have nothing to be self-conscious about and far from self-conscious, but it made it that much easier to do what I want to do.

These Black males expressed their positive perceptions of their college environment as being a place where they could meet and interact with people from different backgrounds. These participants perceived the environment as open and felt comfortable interacting with others. Yet, other Black males did not have much to say regarding positive perceptions of their college environment.

### *Negative Perceptions of College Environment*

The participants also shared their negative perceptions of the college environment. Some of the participants declared negative perceptions because of the cliques, lack of diversity, and the stereotype of being Black. These categories are expounded further below.

*The Cliques.* Although, some of the Black males had great things to say about their perceptions of their college environment, other Black males had negative perceptions. These Black males noted the diversity on the campus, but they saw students grouping rather than branching out.

Keith attended a predominantly African American public high school in the Southern U.S. He explained seeing Black people group together in high school but was quick to say that he saw the same in college. Keith expressed his perceptions of the cliques:

Although you may not see a lot of Black students on our campus, but you will see a lot of them together in the cafeteria at noon when everyone is eating. I kind of see why this happens because for the longest time we were forced to be separated from everyone else, so I am sure we still kind of have that thing where we are a little nervous. We don't know how someone is going to act or treat us so we stick close together. Yet, things have changed, and I feel like that if people were able to mix and mingle and be with everybody or eat with friends of a different race, it would be better.

Keith expressed that as students continued to group together, the chances of learning and interacting with others who are different from you are being missed. Jason explained similar perceptions but spoke from a different perspective.

Jason attended a public high school in the Southwestern U.S. He explained that he saw a divide among students and student-athletes. He shared that all students should be more cohesive as opposed to a division.

I would say it is very much divided; you have the athletes, and you have the student body government. I just felt like people are scared to branch out to integrate with everybody else. You have the athletes and of course their mindset is that I am doing this as a career so what do I need to talk to you for or who are you. I feel that if we worked more as a cohesive unit, we can make this college experience better for everyone.

Jason expressed that the majority of students who attended this university were there for an education. He believed that if students had, the same objective, everyone should work together to help each other reach that objective. Jasper explained similar perceptions but spoke from a student organization perspective.

Jasper had attended different colleges and universities before attending SWU. He stated that he had attended small schools and big schools (SWU being the biggest school) and attended a Historically Black College and University. Of all schools, Jasper asserted that SWU seemed to be the most cliquish.

This is the biggest school I have been to. I started at a small school then went to bigger schools. The HBCU, back east that I went to, had maybe 3,000 students; it was really small. In my freshman year, there may have been 11 people in my class. At SWU, I have seen 150 students in a general class, auditorium style. It was way different. The people here are very different. Each and every other day, you see different people. At the HBCU of course were all African American people. It was interesting to see southern Blacks and Blacks from different cities like New York, California, and where I came from in the Midwest, and we all came together. It was interesting to see that. Here, it seems like it's more. . . I wouldn't say segregated, but I would say it's more cliquish than my other colleges. It's cliquish to where the groups don't want to interact with others. The fraternities and sororities or Greek life is very influential at this school. It's a huge deal here. It just seems like people are a part of it, no matter what. If you want to hang out or go to a party, it's usually held by somebody in the Greek organization. That is one thing that I have noticed. The Greeks kind of makes it a

little more separated. It seems that only rich kids would go to certain organizations or Blacks would go to the historically Black fraternities and sororities. So, it is kind of separated.

These Black males explained that at SWU, students were separated by the cliques. These cliques were perceived as Greek organizations, athletes, or by race. Being in cliques was perceived by these Black males as detrimental to the college experience because students appeared reluctant to engage or interact with other groups. These Black males perceived their college environment as cliquish; others perceived it from a lack of diversity.

*Lack of diversity.* Earlier, some of the Black males perceived their college environment as a place where they could interact with people who come from different backgrounds. They explained how in college, they had been able to interact with different people daily. Although they perceived their environment from a positive cultural perspective, some viewed their environment as negative.

Kurt explained that he was aware that this university was a Predominantly White Institution; however, he felt that diversity was lacking, and at times, the Black people on the campus do not seem to exist. He stated,

It is not that diverse here on the campus. There are a lot of Whites; the Mexicans and Blacks kind of balance each other. Well, there are probably more Mexicans here on the campus than Black people. In almost every class, I am the only one that I see. I don't see Black people in my class. It has always been like that. Especially this last semester, it was really like that. I would say out of my five classes last year, almost every one, I was the only one. One of my classes, there were about two or three of us. I mean I am a senior now, and it reminds me when I first got here. I was like there are not that many people who look like me. It's kind of sad.

Kurt believed he would see more Black students on the campus as he progressed throughout college. He expressed that seeing the lack of Black students on campus

prepared him for what he may see when he goes to graduate school. Desmond shared very similar perceptions as Kurt from what he had seen at SWU.

Desmond attended a public high school in the Southwestern U.S. where he was constantly around people who identified with being a minority. He explained that he had heard students and administrators preach and promote diversity on his campus; however, Desmond has disappointingly seen a dismal reality.

As a student and employee on this campus, I would like to say that we hear in a very, very repetitive kind of way that the university is all about diversity. We hear it and read it but in the sense, I don't see it. So that is what I think. There is no diversity. When I am walking to my classes, and in my classes, and in the residence halls, I don't see the diversity. It doesn't have to be race. It can be from economic background. That is the craziest thing about it. It is talked about because it wants to be there and it is not. It doesn't just stop at ethnic backgrounds, it's social, economical, and the whole gambit. In a sense, it's sad that I think about that and that is my perception, but I think that is what it is. It is so fascinating that I see that because where I grew up and what I saw, it wasn't like this. So when I see a complete 360, it stands out in a sense more than I can ever imagine.

Desmond stated that considering where he came from, being at SWU was a different atmosphere for him. Desmond believed that after hearing how diverse SWU was, he would eventually have seen it, but he did not. Horace perceived the campus in a similar fashion as Kurt and Desmond of being the only one or one of few Black students in his classrooms.

Horace commented on how not seeing Black students or minority students became a little discouraging for him. Coming from a high school where there were other African Americans in his classroom was normal to him, but at SWU, it seemed to be normal not to have any African Americans in his classrooms. He stated,

The ethnic breakdown here is really slanted. There are not a lot of Black people or minority people on campus. You can get discouraged when you get in class and there are five other minority people in class and the classroom is filled with 200 people, it can be discouraging. And when you walk on the campus, I feel the same way. There is no one that looks like you.

Horace explained that he felt more comfortable where he saw people who looked like him when he went to the cultural centers or even the recreation center. Going to the recreation and cultural centers was how Horace coped with his discouraging feelings. Jason also shared his perceptions of what it was like being a minority on the campus.

Jason did not know what to expect; however, when he arrived at SWU, he became very intimidated. Jason came from an area where seeing someone of color was normal for him. Now, for Jason, this had changed. He stated,

I can say from a personal notice that when I first got to college, I was very intimidated. Not because I felt like I wasn't at the same competence level as the rest of my peers, but I was more intimidated that I was the minority because I felt like if we have the majority of college students who are Caucasians, and you only have 3 % of Black people and the majority of those are athletes, I felt like who do I identify with. So, it's like this gap that is there. So for me, I looked at this as being inferior.

Jason passionately explained that even though he was in an environment that made him feel inferior, he was quick to say that things could be worse. Jason explained that because he came from a gang-affiliated area, he had no choice but to tolerate this intimidation because he did not want to go back where he came from.

Some of the Black males perceived SWU as being filled with diverse people from different backgrounds. Others perceived the environment of SWU to be quite different. They explained that the lack of diversity had been discouraging and intimidating for them, but they were determined to persevere. Being the only Black or minority student in

a class or walking across campus could potentially play into stereotypes. These stereotypes were what some of the Black males discussed regarding their perceptions.

*Stereotype of being Black.* Some of the participants shared their perceptions of how people approached them or have made assumptions about them. Some of these perceptions related to some of the Black males' perceptions of when they were in high school. These assumptions related to these Black males playing sports or not being academically inclined.

Paul mentioned earlier how people expected him to be a Rhythm and Blues artist in high school; however, this has changed after he enrolled in college. He stated,

Well, one of the things I have noticed and experienced is that when coming here to college, especially when I talked to one of my friends, since I have been here, numerous people ask me if I play basketball or football. I remember being at a party in my freshman year; a person thought I was this one prominent football player on our team. I was like no, I am not him.

Paul became aggravated when explaining his perceptions. He commented that he felt Black people could only be portrayed from an athletic standpoint in college and not from an academic perspective. Huey shared a similar perception regarding these assumptions.

Huey described in a furious tone how, he had received unwelcoming looks from students, especially those in his college classrooms. He stated,

To be honest, I feel like people don't see or people have this preconceived notion about Blacks. Sometimes, when I sit in class and I am the only one I see amongst everyone else, you sense it that they are looking at you like what is this guy doing here. It makes me very angry and sometimes it even ignites something in me and it make me say yes, I am going to do this and show them that I am supposed to be here and be like, what are you doing here. It's been like that but I thank GOD that I keep proving them wrong. I prove people wrong every day.

Huey expressed anger at others attitudes, he channeled that anger to when people look at him as if he is not supposed to be in a certain to propel him academically and prove people wrong. Jarvis explained his perceptions in a similar fashion as Paul and Huey.

Jarvis explained that being a rather large African American male, he expected some people to ask him if he played sports at his school. Jarvis stated that he appreciated the remarks because he took them as compliments but later became annoyed by them because he was only being viewed as a person that could only be an athlete.

At first, when people asked if I played football or basketball, I used to take it as a compliment. I took it as a compliment because someone was comparing me to a person that has the appearance and quality that plays Division-One sports, the top division in college sports. That was a compliment to me. After a while, when the question starting expanding more to the fact that if I don't play sports here so what do you do here, then it started to get on my nerves when I realized that people didn't think that as an African American, I was capable of anything more than just running or dunking a basketball. That I was capable of wanting to accomplish greatness through academics or that I was capable of being here for other reasons than athletics. So it made me feel kind of mad, and I used to get upset then ask people can I not be Black and in college if am not playing football.

Paul, Huey, and Jarvis passionately expressed their perceptions of how people on campus viewed them. Each stated that playing sports and not being academically inclined was a common assumption among Whites. As some of the Black males mentioned earlier, they had similar perceptions regarding their high school environments. These participants expressed wanting to be viewed differently, from an academic standpoint and not the common athletic perspective just because the majority of the athletes who play football and basketball are Black.

## Research Question 2

How do Black male college students perceive the influence of their educational environments (i.e., high school and college) on their college attendance and achievement?

### *Positive Perceptions of the High School Educational Environment Influencing College Attendance*

The participants' perceptions of how their educational environments influenced their college attendance and achievement were examined. Some of the participants communicated positive perceptions regarding their high school environment influencing their college attendance. A few of the participants perceived their high school environment as influential because of college preparation, the push factory, and self-assertion. The categories are explained further below.

*College preparatory.* The responses for Research Question 2 were examined to ascertain how the participants perceived the influence of their educational environment on their attendance and achievement in college. While analyzing the responses regarding their high school environment, there was a commonality of some of the Black males' environment being college preparatory, their environment pushing them to succeed, their environment being relatable, and their environment creating self-assertion.

Harold expressed his high school's expectation for everyone to get good grades. Earlier, he mentioned that 98% of the students who graduated from his high school attended college.

I guess my perception of this was that no matter what, you were expected of getting good grades. I know like coming from other people that getting a 3.0 was pretty good, but in that high school system that was pretty much. . . it wasn't considered not good but you would have people getting a 3.8 GPA and up, a lot of them.

Harold expressed that being in an environment in which everyone was getting good grades helped influence his academic success in college. Jasper shared a similar perception regarding his high school environment.

Jasper explained that the environment in his high school was geared towards attending college. He commented that the consistent message he heard in high school was, “You will see this information again in college.” He asserted,

I took it really serious in high school because it was one of the first stepping stones to getting a good job and things like that. I knew that what we were learning were the basics and would learn again in college. People always told us that all of these science and math classes you are taking, you will take again in college. So to be honest, my math and science classes I took in high school were the same as it was in college. So, I took it seriously. To be honest, I believe I was more focused then because when I got to college, I was seeing the same material.

Jasper believed his high school environment influenced his attendance in college because each day in school, he explained that receiving good grades in high school seemed like he was already in college. Jasper stated this environment helped create the drive to attend college. Horace also spoke about his high school environment but spoke specifically from a classroom standpoint.

Horace explained how his high school environment influenced his attendance in college. He stated earlier that seeing SWU across from his high school every day influenced his decision to attend college. Yet, instead of speaking from a general perspective, Horace spoke about the environment within his classrooms:

I took a couple of AP classes which were supposed to be higher-level courses than the regular honor or regular classes. Those kind of pushed me because this was what I was supposed to expect. Mentally, it was the kind of material I could get in college. So, I took those classes more seriously I guess because of what people

said about those classes as opposed to a regular honors class that just has an extra project at the end.

Horace explained that these AP classes prepared him for what to expect when he got to college. As a sophomore in college, Horace was appreciative of taking these classes in high school. Keith also shared his perception of his high school environment, but he spoke from a programmatic standpoint.

Keith was quick to explain how appreciative he was of his high school experience. He had a good attitude about his high school from an academic standpoint and perceived his high school as a preparation for college. Keith stated,

I think the high school prepared me for the most part and that gave me a good perception of what I was going into because some of the classes I took were specifically geared towards college. There was ETS which was Educational Talent Search that was ran through a Southeastern University, and they did a lot of stuff with the African American students to make them prepared and to make sure they were motivated and wanted to go to college. I was in AVID, which is Advancement via Individual Determination which helped with study skills and time management. So I felt like I found groups and things that I was able to get into that would prepare me for college.

These Black males perceived their high school environments as steps towards their college attendance. The general environment, classrooms, or programs their schools had to offer created the opportunities for these Black males to be prepared for college. Along with a college preparatory environment, some Black males perceived their environment as pushing them towards success.

*The push factor.* Some of the Black male participants explained that they perceived their high school environment as “pushers” towards being academically successful. Alex noticed a difference between his public and his private high school regarding being pushed to succeed.

Like I could have had like a 4.0 GPA at my public high school. Instead, I had a 3.7 GPA, and I really didn't study or anything; I didn't have to try. But when I went to my private high school, things changed quickly. At my new school, you had to work hard and that was new to me. After my first report card at my new school, it was a big difference. I left my first school with a 3.7 GPA, and when I got to the private school, my GPA was a 2.7 my first year. It was a big wake-up call for me, and I noticed how the environment pushed us to truly study so we can succeed.

Alex recognized that the days of not having to study ended when he became a student at the private school. Alex was confident that if he had not switched schools, he would have still attended college; however, he felt that without his private school pushing him, he would not have been as prepared for college. Reggie expressed similar perceptions regarding his high school environment pushing him towards success.

Reggie stated his high school expected their students to attend college. He explained that he would hear different scenarios about what it would be like without a college degree. Reggie expressed that this pushed the students to attend college. He commented,

My high school expected that most of us to go to college. They have about 70 or 80 % of the seniors go to college. They have been pushing us to go to college since day one. I wanted to go to college because I could get a better job. It just seemed easier because I didn't want to be poor and work really hard to support a family. This is how my high school pushed us by giving us these scenarios. It was just always from day one; it was always that you should go to college because you would get all of these benefits.

As Reggie explained, hearing these stories painted a possible reality he did not want to experience. He explained that going to college was never a doubt because of his parents, but listening to the scenarios gave the extra push. Kurt shared similar perceptions regarding hearing messages in high school.

Kurt explained that the educational leaders in high school would also share stories and scenarios with students regarding college. However, Kurt expressed that these stories related to the college experience. After hearing these messages, Kurt was even more convinced of the importance of attending college. He stated,

I kept hearing people like my advisors and counselors saying how if I loved high school, I would love college even better. They would say the life is better, you are on your own, and you are away from your parents. I was like, that was cool; I want to be a part of that.

Kurt expressed that even if they had not given him that information, he had already decided to go to college. Yet, he said it was reassuring to hear these messages in addition to what his father had already instilled in him.

Being in a high school environment in which a constant message of going to college or what it would be like without a college degree pushed these Black males to attend college. Creating an environment that influences students to study and want to attend college helped these Black males in their educational endeavors. Also, these types of environments may create a sense of drive, desire, or self-assertion that inspires students to want to succeed.

#### *Self-Assertion*

Some of the Black male participants previously spoke of their high school environments giving them that extra push to be academically successful in their route to attend college. Although this may have been true for some of the participants, some perceived their environments as helping to create their own affirmation to academically succeed.

Melvin shared his perception of his self-assertion by doing what he had to do. During the start of his last year in high school, he adopted a popular quote from the movie *The Great Debaters* to express his perception:

In the movie *The Great Debaters*, one of the famous quotes was, “You have to do what you have to do so you can do what you want to do.” This quote has been my drive to do what I need to do. This has been pounded in me even when I don’t want to work. Things like that, me having to do what I have to do so I can do what I want to is so deep in my mind right now, that sometimes I say this is who I am. This is what drives me during my last semester of high school and now through college.

Melvin shared that he wanted to be successful and have a prosperous career. He further asserted that in order for him to be successful and prosperous, he had to take his academics seriously. Along with Melvin’s perception of his self-assertion, Jason commented on how his high school environment strengthened his self-assertion to succeed.

Jason shared earlier that in the area where he came from, the Southwestern U.S., was gang affiliated, and it was tough growing up. He also expressed a similar sentiment regarding his high school being tough; yet, it was not academically tough because some of the educational leaders would only give enough material or information for the students to get by. Jason passionately expressed his desire and drive to go beyond what was given to him in high school. He stated,

I would have to say that I learned to do a lot of things on my own in high school. For example, teachers seemed to teach from a biased perspective and would tell us, this philosopher said this, and that is all you need to know for the test. But in my mind, I automatically start to think why did the philosopher believe that? That would prompt me to actually go to the library and search for myself, and by doing that I accumulate other knowledge because it will branch out to different perspectives. I felt that this was important coming into college. Most of these teachers don’t take into consideration that everybody is coming from a different

level, a different high school, and a different competence level. So most of these teachers are teaching from an intuitive perspective, and they are coming in assuming that we know about a certain theory. The teachers in our high school would say that we are going to discuss a certain topic, and half of us are clueless. So I felt like I didn't want to be that guy that was being lost. I felt that we were being deprived of an education while other people were coming from different facets and different perspectives that would help them get through college and succeed in college. I didn't want to be left out, so I was like let me go ahead and let me do this myself. If you are not going to teach me, I might as well teach myself.

Jason spoke with great disappointment regarding his perception of his high school. He felt deprived of his education. However, Jason's experience helped to create his thirst for knowledge; to go beyond what he was taught and learning in his classrooms. Although Jason would have appreciated an environment in which the teachers taught and he was able to learn from them, Huey expressed being thankful for his environment because it influenced his attendance in college.

Huey explained how his high school environment helped strengthen an already established drive. Huey earlier expressed great admiration for his high school in West Africa, but he also expressed great respect for his high school environment in the U.S. He asserted,

The classes here are much more of an experience of seeing what you want to do. For most of the students when it comes to college, they may not know what they want to do, but high school helps set the foundation. But back home, you choose your major in the beginning of high school because of your passion; however, it doesn't mean that you will get the opportunity to study this major in college because of the lack of opportunities to study that major. Here in America, if you choose to study it, you can do it. It may be limited at certain times, but it is not like back home. Being here in America has helped me over here because I saw that I could study something that I wanted to do, and no one is telling me that I can't. So it is up to you; the ball is in your hands. You have the chances to do it here. This country creates opportunities in which my country hasn't even thought about. That is the sad part of it. It all comes to that, the system here and the

system there. Here you have a choice. You can decide what you want to do, and if you put your effort, someone will see it.

These Black males spoke about their educational environments creating or strengthening their self-assertion. They realized that to succeed, a lot depended on them being able to go beyond what was given in their environments.

The college preparatory of these high schools, the push factor, and self-assertion helped create these positive perceptions for some of the Black male participants regarding how their high school environment influenced their decision to attend college. These Black males were able to take certain facets from their environments to help with their progression to college. Some of the Black male participants perceived their high school environment as positive, whereas others viewed their environment from a negative perception.

*Negative Perceptions of the High School Educational Environment Influencing College Attendance*

The participants also revealed negative perceptions of their high school environment influencing their college attendance. Some of the participants proclaimed negative perceptions because of the lack of resources their schools provided.

*Lack of school resources.* Some of the Black male participants spoke of how their school environment was used for other things besides promoting education or teaching. This negative perception from these Black males painted a bleak reality which these participants faced.

Alex spoke about how he saw a major difference from his public school to the private school regarding the usage of the lunch rooms as well as the library. Alex explained,

Well at my private school, if our library was full, you could see students going to the other library right down the street. If you couldn't find a spot to study in the library, you would sometimes see them in the lunch room, not eating lunch but studying. But at my public high school, you hardly ever saw people studying at all. If you saw people in the library, they were not studying; they were there to be on the Internet to look at pictures, ESPN, music videos, or to socialize. Some students would tell their teachers they are going to the library so they could get out of class and be with their friends. We never saw anyone in the lunch room studying.

Alex explained that seeing a complete difference in the environment was shocking for him. Alex admitted that he felt more comfortable and had more fun when he was in his public school, yet he further expressed that being in an environment that promoted education and seeing students use the library and lunch room to study helped keep him focus in an academically inclined environment and prepare for college. Jason also shared his perception regarding how his school was used in other ways than promoting education.

Jason earlier expressed his great disappointment with his high school environment regarding how the teachers taught. Jason's dissatisfaction increased when he noticed his school environment was promoting mediocrity.

My high school environment promoted mediocrity. The students were taught to be content with being oppressed and to be content with poverty. To tell you the truth, success was distorted from our perspective because success was very rarely seen from what a model of success is. For us, if we were to say that someone is successful, for our thinking is that they have a lot of money; therefore, we equated that to success. Whereas from a broader standpoint, if you were to go to a good high school or a good private high school in Western Region City, their idea of success is that this person has just got accepted into Princeton and that person is

going to be successful. My high school didn't teach this. My high school basically felt like that if you didn't beat up two people today, then that is success because you calmed your anger down. Whereas if you got an A, you are successful. Fill out these college applications, and you can go somewhere and be successful. But I never got that. I had to go out there and get it on my own, and I had to do the research myself for myself. It was through self-assertion. So for me, it was trying to figure out which one perspective of success is actually the correct one and to which perspectives of success do I want. So I felt like the person being accepted into Princeton is more successful because they don't have to live here where we have to live. They don't have to go through some of the same stuff that we have to.

Jason perceived his environment as conducive to keeping students in a state of mind where there was no room to succeed. He continued to state that if you did not have an intrinsic motivation to succeed, student would not succeed.

The positive and negative perceptions were quite similar even though they were coming from different high schools. These participants had perceived their environments in positive and negative fashions but, importantly shared how they used these environments to help with their attendance in college. These Black males were attending the same university, and some perceived their college environment in similar fashions. Some of the perceptions were consistent with the perceptions of the educational environments from high school, and some perceptions were different.

*Positive Perceptions of the College Educational Environment Influencing College Achievement*

The participants chatted about their college environment influencing their achievement in college. Some of the participants perceived their college environment as a positive influence on their achievement because of the concept of self assertion. This concept is deliberated below.

*Self-Assertion.* Some of the Black male participants previously spoke about how their environments helped create or strengthen their self-assertion to succeed academically in their high school en route to college. Some of these similar perceptions were reflected in other Black males regarding their achievement in college as well.

Horace explained how being in college created his drive and will to succeed. He asserted,

Being in college, it's very independent. There is not as much as a connection to the professors in college as it was in high school because of the big classes. They may know your face but they don't know your name, who you are, or stuff like that. So, a lot of it's on you and make things happen, make yourself succeed. Unlike in high school, you may have your buddies that are in your classes every day to help you out with assignments, but here, you may not get to know other students that well because the other students may not come to class all the time, or once class is over, the students leave quickly. So, the environment affects me in a way since I am paying for these classes, I have to do well. You don't want to waste your money, opportunities, and efforts. I don't want to take the relaxed approach. I want to excel so I can get out of here. I do have scholarships, but it's my hard work that is paying for what is in front of me, and I have to make the most of it.

Horace realized the difference between in high school and college. In high school he was exposed to many different support systems such as his friends and being close to his teachers to help him succeed. In college, Horace stated, these opportunities may not come and has to make the declaration himself to succeed. Harold commented in a similar way regarding his perceptions.

Harold explained that his success in college was all about him, the time and effort he put in. He stated,

For me, it's how much time I put into the work. One of my problems is just how much time I put into it; that is how I perform. The amount of time I put into it determines my performance. So it hasn't affected my performance either way. It is just how much effort and time I put into the work. I am putting a good amount but probably not enough. At least last year, it wasn't enough. My grades reflected

it and showed I wasn't putting enough time and effort as I definitely could have done a lot better.

Harold understood that his performance in college depended upon the time and effort he expended. He was quick to admit that he had not performed as well as he would have liked to; yet, he was also quick to take full responsibility for his lack of performance and not place the blame upon others. Jason also shared the perception of taking control of his environment.

Jason expressed earlier that being in college could be intimidating due to being a minority or being inferior. Yet Jason passionately expressed not letting this situation control him.

Being here at college, it can get bad, but at the same time, no matter how bad it gets, it could be a lot worse. By being a lot worse, I could be back at home and given where I came from, I didn't want that to happen. So I had to either get with the program or go back home which is something that I didn't want to do. So, I got with the program because of that self-assertion I previously had. This self-assertion that I had in high school carried over to college. I went ahead and made sure I talked to my professors, made sure I went to the library, and understood what I was reading in the text and things like that.

Jason explained how being in college was an improvement from where he came from. He asserted that his college environment continued to reaffirm the self-assertion he had in high school. Due to his background, Jason explained that his self-assertion was very important to have in college in order for him to succeed. Kurt explained similar perceptions about not letting the college environment disrupt his success.

Kurt perceived that college success was up to the individual. He understood there would be times when you faced obstacles, but it was up to you to succeed. Kurt continued,

College success depends on you. If you want to succeed or be like the top student in your class, you have to go out and do it. There will always be people that are trying to hold you back, but you have to rise to the occasion. People may not physically hold you back, but certain situations may. Like my one roommate, he was not really the educational type, and I don't even know why he went to college. He didn't take classes the last two semesters, and he always wants to go out and do stuff. This was cool in the beginning, but after a while, I realized that I couldn't do this and I had to refocus.

Kurt perceived his college environment as a place where he made the choice of whether or not to succeed. Although Kurt was distracted by his roommate who was not attending classes and always wanting to go out to socialize, Kurt realized he needed to make the choice to refocus on his education. Jarvis explained a similar perception; yet, he was more focused towards academics.

Jarvis mentioned that being in college was about using what it had to offer for you to succeed. He believed anything that did not contribute to his academics was a hindrance. Jarvis stated,

You shouldn't need friends or romantic relationships or anything like that to graduate from college. College should be about academics and networking and everything else it provides. All of the other stuff you can do when you get out of college. You know the whole connotation that college is the most fun year that should happen in your life. It's a good time to drink and party and all of that other stuff, and if that is what you decide to do with your college career, then so be it. But that is not what college is for me. College is about getting an education. You know what, in my opinion, it doesn't really have to do anything with me being Black or that I have to prove anything to anybody. I am going to do it because that is what I want to do.

Jarvis perceived his environment from an educational and networking standpoint; he was only interested in certain aspects that would positively help in his route to graduation.

The ways in which these Black males perceived their environment strengthened their self-assertion to achieve in college. Being in a positive environment that promoted

success motivated these Black males to achieve. Although they perceived environments that promoted achievement, others viewed their environment as negative because they felt the need to impress their educational leaders to be viewed in a successful manner.

*Negative Perceptions of College  
Environment Influencing College Achievement*

The participants also revealed negative perceptions of their college environment influencing their college achievement. Some of the participants expressed negative perceptions because of their need to impress to succeed.

*The need to impress.* While in college, some of these Black males perceived their environment to be strengthening towards being self-assertive. However, some of the Black males perceived the need to impress their educational leaders. Cameron perceived his environment to influence him from a negative standpoint. He stated,

Sometimes I feel like, with the teachers, I just have to impress them and show them that I am not a slacker or that I am lazy; I can be as academically inclined. It's sad but it is pretty much my motivation. I feel like they have painted a picture of how Black people are which is not fair for me. I am not like every other Black male. So, I feel like you have to impress them and stuff. Also, I can't miss class because they will know it. It will be quite noticeable with me being the only one in the class.

Cameron perceived his environment as influencing him to achieve; yet, he wished to impress his professors academically and felt he had to do extra in order to be viewed in the same light. Jason also explained his perceptions regarding impressing his educational leaders.

Jason perceived his environment to be racially prejudiced with regard to he was treated by some of his professors. Jason perceived that he had to impress his professors more so than other students. He mentioned,

I have to say that I notice a lot of racial prejudice even between professors and students, whereas they are probably more attentive to other students than they would with Black students. It's like for me, I noticed it when I talked to professors or I would go to their office hours, and I would say a word and their eyes would get wide like, wow you know that word. In my eyes, why would they assume that I wouldn't know that word?

Jason and Cameron expressed how their environments made them feel as if they had to impress their professors to avoid being viewed as lethargic or uneducated. Even though they used these experiences for their motivation to succeed, when listening to their perceptions, it was evident that they wished they did not have to go through these experiences.

### Research Question 3

How do Black male college students perceive the influence of educational leaders (i.e., high school and college) on their college attendance and achievement?

#### *Positive Perceptions of the High School Educational Leaders Influencing College Attendance*

The participants also recited positive perceptions of their high school educational leaders influencing their college attendance. The responses for Question 3 were examined to make certain of how these Black male participants perceived the influence of their educational leaders on their college attendance and achievement. Some of the participants attributed positive perceptions to the college preparation, constructive leaders, and the push factor.

*College preparatory.* After analyzing the responses regarding the Black males' perceptions, it was evident that these participants perceived their high school educational leaders positively.

Melvin explained that his educational leaders gave him the tools to be successful, but it was up to him to decide how to use the tools. Consequently, he only paid attention to the leaders who provided support.

The majority of the educational leaders, probably about 98% of them, were either just discouraging or they straddled the fence. But, the other 2 %, I looked at them like mentors such as my drama teacher and the football coach. All of my life, I would hear you could be whatever you want to be, and they would tell you that you have to do certain things. But they wouldn't tell you how or show you how. These mentors were honest and would tell us that we might not like what they had to say, that we would also say that we would hate it, and wouldn't want to do it. I appreciated this authentic information and looked at them as mentors. I realized that everything they said was not going to make me smile and laugh, but at the end of the day, I knew I was going to shake their hands and appreciate it.

Melvin shared with great emphasis that he respected the educational leaders he spoke of in high school. He was not afraid to admit that he did not like some of the advice he received from his educational leaders because they would not show him how to be focused in college or to study in college; however, Melvin was very appreciative of learning this information on his own while being in college. Melvin expressed having ownership of his educational process. Horace shared a similar perception regarding his educational leaders in high school.

Horace mentioned earlier that he took his AP classes seriously because they were more advanced than regular honor classes. He explained that these classes pushed him harder and that the leaders of these classes also gave him that extra push for college. He stated,

Those AP teachers approached us differently as opposed to the regular or honor classes. They had different expectations for us, higher expectations for us to strive harder for the work we were going to be doing. Those teachers and courses gave me the extra step of being ready in college; they truly helped.

Horace stated how his educational leaders and the courses he had taken in high school helped with laying the foundation for college. He explained that these high expectations gave him an idea of what to expect in college.

Jasper stated his educational leaders began speaking to them of what to expect in college, how many credits to take, and how many credits not to take. He received this information during his freshman year of high school.

They made it known to us that it was extremely important to start off our freshman year good. They stated that our freshmen year was critical. They showed us what was going to happen throughout the years. They told us how many credits to take and not to overload. They stated not to take more than 14 in your freshmen year since it would be our first year after high school. It was amazing to hear this information in our freshman year of high school. They were really helping us to get prepared for college without even being there.

Jasper asserted that his educational leaders were very direct in preparing them for college. He admitted that it was intimidating to hear this information as a freshman, but Jasper was appreciative.

These Black males explained how their educational leaders approached them from a college preparatory perspective. This perspective provided these participants assuredness in their attendance and achievement because what they experienced in high school was preparation for college. Even though some of the participants did like all of the information they were receiving or viewed the information as intimidating, after looking back while in college, they were very appreciative. Along with some of these Black males viewing their educational leaders as preparing them for college, some of them also viewed their educational leaders as constructive.

*Constructive leaders.* Some of the Black males spoke of how their educational leaders were genuine, extremely intelligent, and helpful. These participants expressed how these educational leaders had major influences on their attendance in college.

Robert explained that being authentic was very important to him. Although Robert did not have the luxury of a lot of authentic teachers, he expressed his gratitude for experiencing the few authentic leaders. He asserted,

I appreciated the teachers who would be themselves around me; they would act normal. If they were talking to someone like another teacher or had visitors from another college, they wouldn't act differently. They wouldn't be two-faced compared to some other people that I have experienced. They would talk normal and just be themselves when they were around me or another teacher they know, but when someone was to visit from the university or from a community service, they would still be the same.

Robert continuously expressed that being authentic was one of the most important tenets to him. He explained that he felt more of a connection and learned more from authentic teachers. Robert asserted that being authentic speaks to the credibility of the teacher.

Harold spoke of his connection with his teachers but from an intellectual perspective.

Harold was quick to denote that his high school received a lot of publicity and people moved to the area just to go to this school.

The educational leaders in our high school were extremely bright. Because of our high school, we had the best teachers from around the whole county. These teachers wanted to be here; they enjoyed teaching and wanted to teach us at our high school because of the reputation of our school. I believe because of the reputation of our high school, we definitely got some really good teachers.

Harold recognized that his school was equipped with the best resources and educational leaders. Harold viewed his teachers as more than just teachers. He explained his

connection was intellectual, yet he viewed them as friends who prepared him for college. Colin explained similar perceptions regarding his educational leaders.

Colin attended a public high school in the Southwestern U.S. He explained that the educational leaders in his high school were extremely helpful. Although he had extremely helpful leaders, he experienced unhelpful leaders as well.

In my first three years at my high school, I had a great counselor. She was on top of everything. She was on the ball, asking what colleges I have applied to, informing me of what scholarships that were available, and was always telling me that I need to take care of certain paperwork quickly. She was really on the ball. But, in my senior year, my counselor sucked . . . sucked horribly. I did not get a single call in for a scholarship. I was getting offers from schools to play basketball, but she never gave them to me. If it wasn't for my coach going to get my letters, I wouldn't have received them.

Colin was quick to glorify the counselor he had for his first three years of high school but was also quick to discuss his anger towards his senior counselor. Colin expressed appreciation for having a coach that who out for him. He viewed his coach as an educational leader as well. Jimmy commented on his educational leaders but focused on three teachers.

Jimmy was adamant that the majority of the educational leaders in his high school were not educational leaders. His perceptions of the leaders, the administration, were that they were only concerned about making money for the school. However, Jimmy spoke very highly of three teachers.

The three teachers I really did like were Dr. Jones, Mr. Hood, and Mr. Hines. Unfortunately, Mr. Hood left after the first year at school. He was a history teacher. He said it how it was; he was not shy and was a really great guy. He made history fun; he was very nice and supportive of students. Mr. Hines, me and him had an interesting relationship. He recognized that I was a good writer, but when I did rebellious things, he caught on to it. He told me to stop fooling around and do my work. I liked him a lot and his style of teaching. He was kind of like,

Jimmy concentrate because you have so much potential. Dr. Jones, she was the sweetest thing ever, and no one wanted to hurt her. She was like fairy. She is the sweetest and most mild woman you would ever meet. She was completely harmless and put everyone at ease. She was supportive and never uttered a bad word as far as I could remember. She was just really lovely and everyone loved her. She was a big support of all of my activities I did in school.

Jimmy spoke with passion and grace regarding his three teachers and explained that having these teachers made his high experiences a little better. Kurt also perceived his educational leaders in a constructive manner because they provided assistance and were educational role models for him.

Kurt perceived his educational leaders as extremely helpful in providing assistance in his process for college. Kurt explained how seeing the success of one of his leaders influenced him.

I had a really good advisor. I have known her for like five years throughout high school. She was probably one of the most influential persons I have known. She has helped me out with recommendation letters and stuff like that. She would find information for me about this college. I had a lot of good leaders. My principal was real cool, and the coaches were good as well. My principal was a doctor and so I wanted to follow her footsteps, not in education though, but she had her Ph.D., and she was the principal of the school. Obviously if you have the Ph.D. and you are the principal, you are doing something right. So I kind of wanted to follow her regarding getting my Ph.D. My coaches were leaders while I was on and off of the basketball court. They were serious when it came to game time as they wanted to win. But off of the court, they were probably just as good as my advisors. They wanted all of us to go to college, for us to take it to the next step whether it was on an athletic or academic scholarship.

Kurt explained that he experienced positive educational leaders all around him in high school.

These Black males perceived their educational leaders in high school as providing assistance towards their steps to attend college, being authentic, and being educational role models. As these Black males perceived these educational leaders to be constructive,

others took this constructivism and viewed it as “pushers” towards their academic success.

*The push factor.* Some of the Black male participants perceived their educational leaders as preparing them for college or being constructive; other Black male participants perceived their educational leaders as “pushers” towards being academically successful.

Reggie did not perceive his educational leaders as only teachers, but he saw them as challengers, challengers who pushed the students to think “outside the box.”

The counselors would push people to go to college. They would help you find the best classes to take that would help you prepare for college. If you were struggling in a class, they would help you out. One of my teachers, I had a very good relationship with. He would challenge us first of all. He wouldn't just give us an assignment to give us a grade on it. He would push us and challenge us about what we learned from the assignment and how we could apply it in certain aspects of life. We would talk about interesting topics in class, even topics about race and stuff like politics and economics. It was an English class, and it included all of these topics. It was more at the college level where you would get more in depth with your readings, and he didn't just teach it like at a basic level. He would challenge us on our reading. I could talk to him about problems or anything I would have in my class.

Reggie was pleased to have this connection with his English teacher. He also shared that this English teacher provided recommendation letters for him to attend college. Melvin explained similar perceptions regarding one of his educational leaders who was strictly related to him being pushed.

Melvin explained that he knew it was always important to be a smart worker but would admit that he wasn't the smartest person. However, Melvin stated that his German teacher noticed he wasn't the smartest worker but chose to push him in other areas.

Some teachers like our German teacher, he would always acknowledge that I was the hardest worker he had ever seen in his life. And he might tell the next dude the same thing he just told you, but he would sometimes say that the reasons why I

tell so many people that you are the hardest worker I have ever seen in my life is because when I watch you, you work so hard that I can't even think about anybody else that even compares to how hard you are working right now. So I took that like here is a person who is pushing me to continue working hard. He recognized I might not be the smartest worker, but as long as I am the hardest worker, I would always make it.

Melvin was quick to say that he was working hard at becoming the smartest worker but knew his hard work would soon turn into him being the smartest worker. Melvin explained that his German teacher was instrumental in his continued drive towards attending college. Along with Melvin's perception, Keith perceived some of his educational leaders in the highest regard.

Keith shared that his drama teachers played important roles in his college attendance. He explained how his drama teachers pushed him to use what he learned in drama for his other classes as well.

My drama teachers really wanted to see me succeed, and they always said I was a joy to work with. They challenged me to use what I learned in my drama classes to use in my other classes. So I did. Because of my acting and getting on stage and not having stage fright, when I went to my marketing classes, my marketing teacher loved me because I could get up in front of classes and make presentations. I was used to big crowds in front of me, and I could just talk and it wouldn't bother me. I didn't have the paper in front of me; I could look people straight in the eye when I was talking. I didn't see it at first, but that drama background actually helped me in business. I can admit that if it weren't for them, my drama teachers and marketing teacher, I wouldn't have attended college. I still was motivated, but if I didn't have good teachers to get me along and to show me, especially my marketing teachers because that is what I want to major in. Those teachers looked after me, and they wanted to see me succeed and were willing to help me at any point. If I didn't have those people to help me and to push me along, I doubt that I would have made it to college.

Keith was not hesitant to say that his marketing and drama teachers played significant roles in his college attendance. Keith expressed complete appreciation for what he

learned from these teachers, and he was able to utilize what he had learned in his other classes.

These Black males expressed their perception of their educational leaders as “pushers”; pushers towards these Black males working hard, going beyond what was given in an assignment, and for these Black males to use what they had learned from one class to the next. These participants expressed great satisfaction regarding their educational leaders. These Black males’ perceptions of their educational leaders were from a positive perspective; other Black males’ perceptions were not as complimentary.

*Negative Perceptions of the High School Educational Leaders Influencing College Attendance*

Some of the participants also clarified negative perceptions of their high school educational leaders influencing their college attendance. Some of the participants designated their high school educational leaders as deconstructive leaders.

*Deconstructive Leaders.* Some of the Black males spoke of their positive perceptions regarding their educational leaders, but other Black males experienced a different reality in their high schools. These Black males commented on their leaders not being able to teach certain subjects, being more focused on making money, or being babysitters and not teachers.

Charles expressed great resentment toward his math teacher. He explained that he learned more from one of the students than he did from his teacher.

I had a math teacher last year, who used to teach here at SWU, but in my perspective, she didn’t know anything. I was taught math by a sophomore; I got a sophomore to teach me how to do problems in math because the teacher didn’t know what she was talking about. It was a little embarrassing that this sophomore taught me while I was a senior. This was my pre-calculus class. So basically,

every chapter that the teacher would explain and I would have no idea what was going on, so I would just ask her how to do this and what do I do. And then I would get taught that way and I scraped a B out of that class. I am nervous about this because this could become a problem when I take a math class here in college. But this was common amongst the other students in that class. We got stuck with the worst teacher.

Charles spoke with disappointment regarding his math teacher and could not understand why she was a teacher. Charles stated that he was glad to be taught the material by a student but would have been more appreciative if he was learning this material from his teacher. Jimmy expressed similar perceptions regarding his educational leaders, yet he viewed some of his educational leaders to be more focused on money than education.

Although Jimmy spoke with great contentment regarding three of his teachers, he did not share the same regard for the upper administration within his school. Jimmy explained that the upper administrators were more focused on campaigning and bringing in money as opposed to education.

Our headmaster is a business man unlike the previous headmaster who was actually about the education and the students. The current headmaster was into all these schemes in order to make the school more profitable. He was into this boarding campaign, trying to get more students to board, trying to get more students to come to our school, and raising the price of food. He hosted a play to show off our school; he changed the uniforms and rules. There were more brochures for our school and they were everywhere. It just seemed like he went through this campaign to recruit more students for the sake of money.

As Jimmy expressed previously, he was hesitant to call his headmaster an educational leader because he viewed him more as a campaigner who focused on bringing in money. Jimmy truly believed the educational attention from his headmaster was missing and wished this component was present. Jason explained very similar unsatisfactory sentiments regarding his perceptions of his educational leaders.

Jason resented his educational leaders because he saw them as babysitters and not as teachers. He explained that these teachers were more fixated on student behavior than on.

To tell you the truth, I felt like the high school teachers weren't even teachers; they were babysitters. Most of the kids were coming from dysfunctional families. So when you don't have that parental structure at home on the proper way to act or the way to show respect in the classrooms and they are using obscenities and all that stuff, the teachers tend to put more emphasis on controlling behavior rather than the education. There was no emphasis on education. It was sad. Most of my friends, even in my senior year, were still reading at a third grade level. They were still reading at a third grade level, and the teachers put so much emphasis on their behavior that they didn't care about education. They felt like, you will learn this from time to time. They really counted us out. We had kids who were failing and reading at a third grade level, yet we have no after school programs, no after school tutoring, we have no teachers calling parents houses saying, did you know that your kid is reading at the third grade level. Here is how we can do it to fix it. No one set up any tutorial programs. None of this was happening. But, I would guarantee you if you asked the teachers how come they didn't set up these programs, they would say that I am not getting paid for that. They were more fixated on getting paid than actually having their students succeed, having their students getting to a better level. And their job is to teach

Jason continuously explained how he felt cheated out of his high school education. He expressed that this high school was where he developed self-assertion. Jason perceived his educational leaders to be babysitters and only wished they were really teachers.

*Positive Perceptions of the College Educational Leaders Influencing College Achievement*

The participants shared their perceptions on their college educational leaders influencing their college achievement. Some of the participants explained positive perceptions because they viewed these college leaders as constructive leaders.

*Constructive leaders.* Some of the Black males spoke of how their perceptions of their educational leaders had been engaging, interactive, and quite helpful. These

participants explained how their educational leaders have provided influence in their achievement in college.

Colin expressed interacting with different educational leaders at SWU and had always experienced help from them. He explained,

I would say that the president is a great educational leader here. He actually shows that he cares; he mingles with people which give more of a sense of a community here and makes you want to do better and succeed here because it makes you feel like you belong. The professors here take their time, they explain things, they care how you do, they actually try and make or help you understand, their office hours are a great idea, and they are there for you. They even seem more personal, and they have more time. Even in the huge classes, like you can get a one on one if you needed which is a lot better.

Colin was quick to acknowledge his educational leaders in a positive light. He explained that most students may not get the opportunity to interact with the president; however, he expressed having opportunities to interact with him because of the different awards he had received. Colin appreciated his opportunities to interact with the president as well as his professors. He further asserted that students should take the initiative in interacting with their professors because they do want to help, but you have to reach out to them.

Keith shared a similar perception regarding his educational leaders.

Keith perceived his educational leaders as welcoming and helping. He explained that in high school, he always heard the professors wouldn't be around or never having the time to interact with their students; however, that had not been his perception or experience. Keith stated,

I feel like the staff on campus wants you to succeed, want to help you, and very accessible. That was one of the things that I always heard in high school that college is huge, and you are not going to get time with your professor. But, I have experienced quite a few professors in which I have had the opportunity to talk to outside of class. The class sizes are not that daunting unless it's a huge lecture hall

such as a general education. But if you are taking an English, math, or accounting class, those are the smaller class sizes, and the teachers are easily accessible, and you can get to them. You can talk to them and email them, and they will respond and help you out.

Keith perceived his educational leaders as helpful and also easily accessible. He explained witnessing students complain about not being able to talk with their professors; however, he stated that most students had never made the attempt to contact their professors. Keith expressed realizing that sometimes, all it takes is an email and you could potentially have a meeting with your professor every week. Along with Keith perceiving his educational leaders as helpful, Jasper perceived his educational leaders in a position in which he may want to be one day.

Jasper expressed having great respect and admiration for his professors and teaching assistants. He acknowledged that they had a lot on their plates, but yet they were still helpful. Jasper explained,

I have had a lot of graduate students as teachers, and I had a few professors. The higher level you get in classes, the more you deal with professors. I have only dealt with just a few professors so far. So pretty much, everybody that I have been taught under, they seem to be around my age and with the same experiences, but they have just gone to school longer and done more. They seem like good people to hang out with. When I saw like a professor or the president, you can just go to them and talk about anything; they are that open and welcoming. Professors definitely do take the time. It could be 200 students or 10 students in a class and they will take the time to help you when you need it. I do respect them on many different levels because I know they are doing research as well as teaching. I know they are really busy, and I have a pretty high respect for them because they are going through those steps in which I will probably be taking when I graduate and when I go to graduate school. I look at them, and I see how they carry themselves and how they organize themselves because I know they are teaching this class, grading papers, and having their own research. So I see how they deal with it just so that when I am in that position, I will have some kind of background on it. So I will have some kind of knowledge about it. I just try to learn from them.

Jasper perceived his educational leaders in places where he wanted to be in the future.

Jasper wanted to maximize his learning opportunities by finding time to interact with his teaching assistants and professors to begin preparing for his future. Jason expressed similar perceptions regarding his professors.

Jason perceived that most of the professors who had the most impact on students were the ones who interacted with students during their office hours. Jason explained students should take advantage of these opportunities because professors will continue to get paid, regardless of whether students use their office hours.

I feel that these professors are allowing us to think outside of the box for ourselves and especially for the Black students that it is more imperative for them to get their education because professors get paid whether you pass the class or not. That is the way I look at it. So they can reinforce all of these things and make sure you do this and that and give you a grade and move on. But, what I feel is that those few professors that you make an impact on, you actually have a one to one conversation with them in their office hours. I feel that a person can give motivation to succeed academically when they do that rather than sitting in a class with 300 students in a lecture room, and you have this one professor, and he doesn't even know your name.

These Black males expressed the importance of interacting with their educational leaders outside of their classrooms. These participants perceived their educational leaders as engaging and helpful, but they acknowledged that students may have to take the initiative in interacting with professors to help with their achievement in college.

Although these participants perceived their educational leaders from these positive standpoints, some of the Black male participants did not perceive their educational leaders from this same perspective. They perceived their educational leaders in a negative fashion.

*Negative Perceptions of the College Educational Leaders Influencing College Achievement*

The participants also revealed negative perceptions of their college educational environment influencing their college achievement. Some of the participants amplified their perceptions of the college educational leaders as deconstructive.

*Deconstructive leaders.* Some of the Black males perceived their educational leaders to be engaging and interactive, whereas others viewed them as careless and some robotic. They perceived their educational leaders as place holders who collected a check.

Alex perceived his educational leaders to be not as uncaring, paycheck collectors who had more than one student to worry about. Being in college, according to Alex, you have to make sure you are seeking the necessary help for your classes. He stated,

As far as I know and from what people have told me, they can care less about whether or not you are in class. They are not going to check attendance every day like you were in high school. The true fact is that they are getting their money. So they don't care. And they already have hundreds of students to worry about. They don't have time to focus and wait on one student to continue with their learning.

Alex perceived his educational leaders to be concerned only with getting their paychecks. Paul shared similar perceptions regarding his educational leaders collecting paychecks or conducting research.

Paul perceived his educational leaders to only be focused on their research or getting paid. Paul's perception was confirmed by one of his professors. He conducted an interview for a class project and discovered this information.

Some of the educational leaders are just here to collect a paycheck. I remember this one professor I had to interview for another class. In the interview, they stated they only have to teach because they are supposed to. The professor was more interested in their research, but since it is a part of their job to go teach, this is

what they do, and you can see that in their performance. They don't want to be there, but they are there because they have to be there.

Paul perceived educational leaders to be more focused on conducting research. He commented that he did not see a problem with conducting research, but maybe the university should hire professors who really want to teach students. Ronny explained his negative perception regarding his educational leaders from a different perspective.

Ronny expressed that the educational leaders were a part of system in which they were programmed to disseminate information to the students. He expressed there was no sense of involvement, interaction, or engagement. Ronny commented,

I don't really think too much about them. Because the instructors to me are like robots; they never really meet you, and you don't meet them unless you are in a small course. But so far, I am in lectures, so I really don't think too much about them. They are just a robot with knowledge programmed in their head that are just outputting to us or just speaking to us what they know. They are not really connected to us; they are just telling us information, and we write it down and study it for the test. It's like a system, and they are just robots.

Ronny perceived his educational leaders to be systematic and careless. He explained that the leaders gave students information to study in order to relay back to them. Ronny explained that everybody was a part of this circular cycle of how information was distributed to the students, and the students gave the information right back to the leaders in a test.

### Summary

This chapter presented an analysis of selective narrative data from interviews with participants. The information was organized and analyzed in categories such as status of school, diversity, being comfortable, the push factor, college preparatory, and cliques. Other categories consisted of being stereotyped as being Black, not being able to relate,

lack of diversity, lack of school resources, the need to impress, and constructive and deconstructive leaders. These categories illuminated key statements from individuals and in collective voices. The next chapter presents a discussion of the findings and conclusions.

CHAPTER 5  
SUMMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS,  
IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The numbers of Black males attending college have precipitously declined during this decade (Cross & Slater, 2000). Numerous researchers (Hefner, 2004; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Kaba, 2005; Kaiser, 2006; Noguera, 2003) have discussed and determined certain factors and pitfalls contributing to this decline. These factors and pitfalls included life expectancy, health, incarceration, and the targeting or stereotyping of Black men as well as high school drop-out rates, poor schools, inexperienced teachers, non-college preparatory curricula, lack of parental support, and low socioeconomic status. Within this convoluted issue facing Black males, there are still those motivated to attend and succeed in college despite the barriers in K-12 schools, on college campuses, and in society (Dougherty, 2007; Harper, 2006). This study analyzed Black male college students' perceptions of their high school and college educational environments and the roles educational leaders played in their attendance and achievement in college.

This concluding chapter provides an overview of the study, the summary of findings, the discussion of findings, and the implications and recommendations for future research.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze Black male college students' perceptions of their educational environments and the role of educational leaders. This study's

findings were based on the results of semi-structured interviews conducted with 21 Black males consisting of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors attending South Western University (SWU). These Black males were not members of intercollegiate athletic teams. Due to the limited research on Black males' perceptions of their successful experiences in educational environments and with the role of educational leaders, I gleaned from the literature theories and research that supported a conceptual framework for the study. Through the conceptual framework, I developed my own research questions to guide the study.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were examined in this study:

1. How do Black male college students perceive their educational environments (i.e., high school and college)?
2. How do Black male college students perceive the influence of their educational environments (i.e., high school and college) on their college attendance and achievement?
3. How do Black male college students perceive the influence of educational leaders (i.e., high school and college) on their college attendance and achievement?

### Summary of Findings

For the purpose of this study, I created categories from the emerged themes that best reflected commonality and differences of the nature and substance of the findings in

line with the research questions and literature. The findings resulted in these four major themes:

1. Positive perceptions of the high school and college educational environment.
2. Negative perceptions of the high school and college educational environment.
3. Positive perceptions of the educational leaders in high school and college.
4. Negative perceptions of educational leaders in high school and college.

A summary of each theme is described below.

#### *Positive Perceptions of High School Educational Environment*

Some of the participants perceived their high school environment as positive because of the status of their schools, the resources their schools provided, the environment being diverse, and being able to feel comfortable. The participants revealed positive perceptions because their high schools were nationally or locally recognized due to the scholastic achievements of their schools. For example, some of the Black males boasted about their high schools being ranked in the top 10 in the nation or being one of the best in their cities. These Black males expressed that their environment put academics as a top priority which shaped their minds about attending college. Due to the status of the schools, these Black males positively perceived their environment geared toward academics.

The participants also conveyed positive perceptions because their schools offered different classes which helped them prepare for college. Some of these resources consisted of African American literature, physics, and AP Spanish classes that their school provided. Although these Black males were previously planning to attend college,

they perceived their school resources as accommodating tools in their preparation for college.

Apart from the status and resources of the school, some participants perceived their high school environments as positive because of the different people from different backgrounds to whom they were exposed. For instance, some of the Black males shared their appreciation of being around different people from different ethnic backgrounds such as Mexicans, Native Americans, Asians, Caucasians, as well as Blacks. In addition, the participants expressed enjoyment of being around different people from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The Black males expressed interacting with students from a lower class status as well as upper class students. This interaction and exposure helped prepare these Black males for a diverse environment in college and beyond. Last, some of the participants had positive perceptions of their high school environment because they felt comfortable within their school. This state of comfort related to the participants feeling at ease around everyone, including other African Americans. Due to this level of comfort, Black males perceived their high school environment positively.

#### *Negative Perceptions of High School Educational Environment*

Along with positive perceptions, some participants had negative perceptions of their high school environment. These negative perceptions related to being stereotyped as being Black and not being able to relate within their environment. Some Black males discussed negative perceptions due to being stereotyped as being athletes, uneducated, or being a representation of the people on B.E.T. (Black Entertainment Television). The participants expressed not “fitting in” because of these stereotypes. Some of the

participants explained that if they did not fit these stereotypes, they were considered “not Black enough.” Interestingly, these stereotypes came from Black as well as non-Black students. The Black males did not fit the stereotypes of being athletes, uneducated, or people from B.E.T., and as a result, Black males perceived their high school environment negatively.

Along with the stereotypes of being Black, some of the participants expressed negative perceptions of their high school environment because they were unable to relate to other students. Some of the participants explained that they were not well received by their students or teachers due to being outspoken or eccentric. For example, attempts were made by some participants to relate to others by organizing events; however, these events were not well received by their peers or teachers. Some of the participants deliberated from a socioeconomic standpoint of why they were unable to relate to other students. For instance, some participants explained coming from a lower middle class socioeconomic status while their peers were well into the upper class. Due to this difference, a few of the participants felt embarrassed by their family’s status in comparison to their peers’ upper class status and thus, perceived themselves as being unable to relate. Last, some of the participants conveyed being unable to relate due to being one of the few African Americans within their school. The participants shared a self-consciousness of being the only Black person within their classrooms, feeling alone, and unfortunately, unable to relate to the other students. Due to this discomfort, these Black males perceived their environment negatively.

*Positive Perceptions of College  
Educational Environment*

Similar to the high school environment, some of the participants perceived their college environment as positive because of the diversity. Some of the participants explained that after experiencing their high school environment, they were more appreciative of their college environment. For example, a few of the participants came from high school environments in which African Americans were the majority or the minority. Regardless, they were enthusiastic about their college environment having different people from different cultures. Some Black males perceived their environment with many different cultures; others perceived the college environment as being a part of one accepting culture. These Black males explained this accepting culture as an environment in which people from all cultures were welcomed. The perception of the college environment as a place with a multitude of different cultures or a place in which everyone was welcomed and accepted was perceived positively by these Black males.

*Negative Perceptions of College  
Educational Environment*

Alongside the positive perceptions of the college environment, some participants conversed about their negative perceptions. These negative perceptions related to the participants perceiving their environment as “cliquish” and having a lack of diversity. Some Black males asserted negative perceptions because of the grouping of students. They elaborated on seeing Black students, athletes, and members of fraternities and sororities grouping themselves together. With these cliques and students not reaching out

to each other, the participants perceived the chances of learning from or interacting with different people as missed opportunities.

Some participants perceived their college environment positively because of the diversity; others had negative perceptions because of the lack of diversity. Some of the participants viewed their college environment as one in which Black students did not exist. They explained on numerous occasions their consternation at being the only student of color within their classrooms or while walking on the campus. As a result, this lack of diversity created a discouraging and intimidating environment for these participants.

In conjunction with some Black males' negative perceptions of being stereotyped in their high school environments, some Black males had similar negative perceptions of being stereotyped in college. Similarly, some of the Black males shared the nature of the stereotyping as being considered athletes or under-educated due to being Black. These participants wanted to be viewed as academically capable of being at a university and expressed resentment towards the stereotyping and negative assumptions.

*Positive Perceptions of the High School Educational Environment Influencing College Attendance*

A few of the Black males perceived their high school environment as a positive influence on their college attendance. These participants perceived their high school environments as influential because the environment prepared them for college and pushed them to succeed. Moreover, their environments were relatable and assisted them in becoming self-assertive.

The participants voiced how their high school environment expected good grades from students as well as influencing an overwhelming majority of the students to attend

college after graduation. For example, some of the participants indicated receiving course material in high school that was consistent with the academic material they were currently receiving in college. Furthermore, the participants denoted how their high school environment provided programs to motivate students, particularly African American students, to attend college. These Black males perceived these environmental influences as successful pathways to their college attendance.

Some of the Black males perceived their high school environment as pushers towards being academically successful. For example, these Black males explained how their environment pushed them towards studying, and without this push, some would not have been as prepared for college. Moreover, some of the Black males remembered receiving consistent messages from their educational leaders regarding the benefits of attending college as well as the detriments of not attending. They explained hearing positive messages from their teachers explaining different college experiences, which in turn, motivated these participants. On the other hand, some of the participants heard negative messages from their teachers about the detriments of not attending college. These Black males heard their teachers sharing the struggles they could potentially endure without a college degree. Therefore, with these positive and negative stories, the Black males were pushed to attend college.

A few of the participants also perceived their educational environments as creating self-assertion within them. For instance, some of the participants expressed how their environment created a sense of drive or desire to succeed academically. The participants articulated having the drive and wanting a successful career and felt

academics was the key to this success. Some of the participants described being in a high school environment that deprived them of a good education as their teachers were teaching from an “intuitive perspective.” This teacher perspective assumed that students had certain background knowledge and knew certain material when they did not. This resulted in some students having to teach themselves. On the other hand, some students described their high school environment as an open opportunity to prepare for their academic future that supplemented their initial drive to attend college. Regardless of their high schools, these participants perceived their environments as creating or strengthening their self-assertion.

*Negative Perceptions of the High School Educational Environment Influencing College Attendance*

Although some Black males had positive perceptions regarding their influences to attend college, other Black males perceived their environments negatively. One example is that Black males perceived their high school as an environment that failed to promote education or had teachers who failed to teach. Another example that a few of the Black males explained was that students used their libraries for social gatherings as opposed to academic endeavors. These Black males perceived an environment in which their teachers did not provide instruction or guidance. Instead of teaching, some of the Black males perceived their teachers as babysitters who were fixated on the behavior of students as opposed to educating them. These Black males perceived their high school as an environment that did not provide the basic elements for an education; therefore, without an inherent motivation to succeed, these Black males believed that students would not achieve in this environment.

*Positive Perceptions of the College Educational Environment Influencing College Achievement*

As previously stated, some Black males perceived their high school environment positively because it created or strengthened their self-assertion to succeed academically. Similarly, some other Black males perceived their college environment as an influence toward their academic achievement. For instance, some Black males perceived their college environment as a place in which their success was based on their individual motivation. These Black males expressed that in their college environment, the opportunity to connect with other students in a classroom was not as prevalent in comparison to high school. In high school, some Black males expressed having friends in their classes who helped with certain assignments every day. However, in college, these Black males explained that the opportunity to connect with other students in their classrooms was absent. According to these Black males, this absence was due to students not attending or departing quickly at the conclusion of class. For that reason, some of the Black males were unable to unite with other students for potential assistance with certain assignments. Because the student-to-student connection was absent and they were unable to rely on other students for help, these Black males perceived having to succeed on their own. They explained that it was up to them to persevere and to take the initiative in order to succeed.

*Negative Perceptions of the College Educational Environment Influencing College Achievement*

Some Black males perceived their environment as positively influencing their college achievement, whereas other Black males perceived it negatively. Some of the

Black males' perceptions related to the need to impress their educational leaders. These Black males expressed that they felt the need to impress and demonstrate that they were not lazy and were academically inclined. These Black males felt as if educational leaders had painted a negative and stereotypical picture of Black students. Other Black males perceived their professors as being more attentive to White students as opposed to Black students. These Black males explained that they had to go the extra mile to prove they were just as educated as other students. This observation of unfairness resulted in these Black males having a negative perception.

*Positive Perceptions of the High School  
Educational Leaders Influencing College Attendance*

Some of the participants perceived their high school educational leaders as a positive influence on their college attendance. These participants perceived their educational leaders as college preparatory, constructive leaders, and as pushers towards their college attendance. A few of the participants viewed their educational leaders as authentic mentors who taught them how to search for answers to certain problems or questions. For example, some of the Black males asserted hearing messages from their educational leaders that they could aspire to do certain things; however, the leaders would not show or explain how to accomplish that certain task. These Black males interpreted the messages as having to work for what they wanted. Therefore, because of these experiences, these Black males expressed having more ownership of their education while in college.

Other Black males commented on how their educational leaders had higher expectations of them. For instance, some of the Black males explained that by having

advanced placement teachers, they were expected to strive harder towards their academic success. As a result, the higher expectations helped these Black males lay a foundation for college as well as what to expect in college. Furthermore, some Black males received advice from their educational leaders about what to expect in college when they were a freshmen in high school. These Black males felt more prepared when entering college.

Some Black males spoke of their educational leaders preparing them for college, and others spoke of their leaders as being genuine, intelligent, and helpful. A few of the Black males expressed having more of a connection with teachers who were authentic and taught with passion. For example, some of the Black males teachers would not put on a façade during their interaction; they were genuine about who they were as teachers. This was important to a few of the Black males because they perceived authenticity relating to the credibility of their teachers. On the other hand, some Black males viewed the connection with their educational leaders as based on intelligence. For instance, some Black males learned from the best teachers from around the country because of the prestige status of their school. These Black males respected the intellect of their leaders and perceived their intelligence as a major tool that helped them prepare for college. Furthermore, some Black males viewed their intelligent educational leaders as role models they wanted to emulate. For example, some of the participants explained that their educational leaders held terminal degrees (Ph.D. or Ed.D.) in administrative leadership roles. These educational leaders inspired some of the Black males because of their administrative and degree status. These Black males perceived their statuses as attainable for their own future. Moreover, some Black males viewed their educational

leaders as extremely helpful. These leaders provided valuable information such as scholarships and college applications to help these Black males prepare for college.

Last, a few of the Black males perceived their educational leaders as “pushers” towards them being academically successful. These Black males expressed that their educational leaders were challengers. These educational leaders challenged these Black males to think “outside of the box” by using what they had learned in one class in other classes. As a result, these Black males positively perceived their leaders as “pushers” towards working hard.

*Negative Perceptions of the High School Educational Leaders Influencing College Attendance*

Along with the Black males’ positive perceptions of high school educational leaders influencing their college attendance, others perceived these educational leaders negatively. These Black males perceived their leaders negatively because of the lack of competent, caring teachers as well as leaders who focused on making money rather than educating students. For example, some of the Black males recollected being taught certain subjects by other students as opposed to their teachers. Other Black males explained that their educational leaders did not emphasize education, and as a result, some of their classmates were still reading at a third grade level when they were high school seniors. Moreover, some of the Black males perceived their educational leaders as being fixated on ways of making financial gains for the school or focusing on getting paid extra to help students. These Black males perceived and experienced an educational environment in which the teaching component from their educational leaders was lost.

*Positive Perceptions of the College Educational Leaders Influencing College Achievement*

As college students, the Black males shared their perceptions of the college educational leaders. These Black males perceived the leaders as constructive because they were engaging, interactive, and helpful. They perceived their educational leaders as more engaging and helpful in their respective offices than in their classrooms. For instance, some of the Black males mentioned their leaders making more of an impact on them when their interaction took place in the professor's office. They perceived these educational leaders as engaging and wanting to provide assistance; however, the participants acknowledged that students must take the initiative to interact with them. Some Black males continued to explain that professors had a lot on their plate with regard to advising, teaching, and researching, yet they perceived the professors as taking the time to help their students.

*Negative Perceptions of the College Educational Leaders Influencing College Achievement*

Alongside some Black males' positive perceptions of their college educational leaders, other Black males perceived the leaders negatively. These Black males perceived their leaders as deconstructive and only concerned with collecting a paycheck. For instance, a few of the Black males expressed that their professors did not care because there were multiple students within their classrooms. Due to the massive number of students and Black males being unable to develop a connection with the leaders, these Black males perceived the leaders negatively. Other Black males perceived the main objective of their professors was to conduct research and not to teach. Last, some of the

Black males perceived their professors as robots; systematic individuals who disseminate information to their students. Due to the systematic professors who did not care and only focused on collecting a paycheck, these Black males negatively perceived their educational leaders.

### Discussion of Findings

As previously discussed, in their education experiences, participants perceived both positive and negative practices in various educational environments with educational leaders. The analysis of the findings confirmed the relationship of Black males' perceptions of those experiences to selective educational leadership and allied theories and this study's conceptual framework. The theories included elements of work posited by Bolman and Deal (2003), Sergiovanni (1992), and Bass (1998), in addition to selective contemporary allied leadership theories posited by Stephan (1999), Polite and Davis (1999), Freeman (2005), J.A. Banks (1999) C.A.M. (2005), and Gay (2003). To the extent possible, the conceptual framework focused the study on Black males' success rather than deficit thinking in the educational experience. Nonetheless, the findings, educational leadership theories, contemporary allied theories, and conceptual framework showed a connection of positive and negative continuity and discontinuity between the interplay of high school educational environments to the college educational environments. Continuity is the way in which Black males' perceptions in high school and college were joined together so that the experiences in the organizations happened similarly. Discontinuity is the way in which a Black male's experiences in high school and college were not joined together so that activities in the organizations happened

dissimilarly. This continuity and discontinuity pertained to the positive and negative perceptions and experiences that perpetuated Black males' thinking in either the success or deficit model approach to education.

To follow, each research question is revisited followed by a discussion of the findings.

#### *Research Question 1*

How do Black male college students perceive their educational environments (i.e., high school and college)?

The first research question focused on Black males college students' perceptions of their high school and college educational environments. Within the context of this question, several conclusions were drawn. It was evident as described among Black males' perceptions that they perceived their environment positively and negatively. Based on their school's status, presence of diversity, and being comfortable within their environment, Black males perceived their environment as positive. Being in an environment that was locally or nationally recognized created a perception by Black males that was highly respectable. This coincided with Bolman and Deals' (2003) symbolic frame of leadership. In the symbolic frame, Bolman and Deal previously explained how students become attached to their schools' symbols or historical information within their schools. These symbols could be considered as certain programs or the prestigious status of their school. For example, these Black male participants perceived their environment as positive because of their schools' statuses. Furthermore, these Black males perceived their environment as diverse with regard to the different

cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds of the students. Because of the presence of diversity, these Black males commented on being appreciative of interacting with different students. As Bolman and Deal asserted, students become attached to certain symbols within their schools. Therefore, these symbols of status and diversity of the school helped create a positive perception of their high school environment and, in turn potentially influenced these Black males' positive behaviors to strive for academic success within their schools.

Conversely to these positive perceptions, Black males had negative perceptions of their environment. Similarly, some Black males positively perceived their high school environment regarding diversity and being comfortable. However, other Black males perceived their environments negatively because of the stereotypes of being Black as well as not being able to relate. Being in an environment in which these Black males were constantly stereotyped or could not relate to others due to a socioeconomic status created these negative perceptions. These perceptions corresponded to the allied theorist of Stephan (1999) as well as Polite and Davis (1999). Stephan explained earlier that students seem to be prone to rely on stereotypes as a shortcut to dealing with the complexities of the social world. In turn, these shortcuts become the basis for interactions with members of marginalized groups. Some of the participants experienced these stereotypes from their fellow students. For instance, these Black males expressed being in an environment in which students depicted them as athletes or musicians/entertainers. These participants expressed how their fellow students approached them from this athletic or entertainer stereotype which was based on what was witnessed from television. By students viewing

Black males from the media, this potentially created difficulty for some Black males to relate to their environment. Polite and Davis continued with this assertion of difficulty. They previously posited that African American males are haunted by negative portrayals of who they are. Therefore, the stereotypical experiences in which these Black males endured made it difficult for them to relate within their environment. As a result, this created a negative environment from their perception.

As these Black males transitioned from high school to college, some of their perceptions remained consistent while others changed. Some of the Black males perceived their environment as positive from a diversity perspective. Considering the high school environment that some Black males experienced, these Black males appreciated their college environment because of the different cultures with different people. This diversity college perspective related to the work of allied theorist Freeman (2005). Freeman noted that African American students attending predominately White high schools wanted to search for their roots or connection with the African American community and chose to attend HBCUs. In contrast, African American students attending predominately African American high schools strongly preferred PWIs. Some of the Black male participants came from a predominantly Black high school and wanted to attend a college where the environment was not predominantly Black. This finding supported Freeman's study regarding Black students attending predominantly Black high schools wanting to attend a PWI. However, although some Black males attended predominantly White high schools, they expressed wanting to be exposed to a diverse population but still chose to attend a PWI. This finding did not support Freeman's finding

of Black students attending predominantly White high schools and later attending an HBCU. Nonetheless, owing to this diversity perspective, these Black males conveyed positive perceptions of their college environment.

Notwithstanding the positive perceptions of some Black males regarding their college environment, other Black males revealed negative perceptions. These negative perceptions in college were similar to some of the high school negative perceptions such as the stereotypes of being Black. Other negative perceptions of their environment related to cliques and the lack of diversity. As college students, these Black males expressed similar perceptions as previous Black males concerning the stereotype of being an athlete and not academically inclined. As Stephan (1999) and Polite and Davis' (1999) previous assertion related to the Black male perceptions from high school, these similar perceptions can cause detrimental effects towards African American college students. While as college students, these Black males expressed being approached by other students from the athletic stereotype. Because of this athletic stereotype, students viewed these Black males as academically incapable. This negative portrayal of Black males made it difficult for them to cope as non-intercollegiate college students. Consequently, these experiences caused these Black males to have negative perceptions of their college environment.

These Black males also mentioned seeing students grouped together as well as a lack of diversity on their college campus. The participants expressed seeing students grouped together based on race, status, or by Greek organizations. As the Black males were quick to acknowledge a diverse population on their campus, they expressed students

grouping together and not branching out. These perceptions related to J.A. Banks' (1999) and C.A.M. (2005) perspective on multiculturalism. J.A. Banks posited earlier that schools and college campus cultures were seen as foreign, hostile, and self-defeating by students of color. This hostile environment could potentially be a reason why students of color were grouping together. Due to the potential lack of multiculturalism within their college and across campus, students may not be provided with the necessary tools to function within their ethnic culture, the mainstream culture, or within and across other ethnic cultures (J.A. Banks, 1999). Because of this experience, these Black male participants perceived their environment negatively.

These Black males experienced continuity or discontinuity regarding their positive and negative perceptions from their high school to college environments. Some Black males experienced continuity because they perceived their high school and college environments as positive. For instance, Wayne commented about his high school environment, "I just fell in love with people from the Southwest; they are less judgmental people." Along with this positive perception of his school, he expressed this positive perception regarding his college environment, "When you come to college, it's a free world, and nobody is going to say nothing because they are open to new experiences." Jarvis displayed discontinuity as he perceived his high school environment as positive but perceived his college environment as negative. Jarvis stated, "Best High School is not by name but by reputation a college preparatory private school which tries as much as they can to veer you to go to college." However, Jarvis perceived his college environment as negative because of stereotypes:

After a while, when the question starting expanding more to the fact that if I don't play sports here, so what do you do here, then it started to get on my nerves when I realized that people didn't think that as an African American, I was capable of anything more than just running or dunking a basketball.

Huey, on the other hand, experienced continuity due to some of his negative perceptions of his high school and college environment. He stated, "They [Blacks] didn't want to interact with me as I had to conform or act like them in order to be accepted. Yes, I looked like them but yet I was different." Regarding his college environment, he asserted, "Sometimes, when I sit in class, and I am the only one I see amongst everyone else, you sense it that they are looking at you like what is this guy doing here." Last, Reggie experienced discontinuity due to some of his negative perceptions regarding his high school but perceived his college environment as positive. Pertaining to his high school environment, Reggie explained, "They [White students] assumed you should be playing football or basketball. And if you don't play these sports, you are not Black enough." However, Reggie shared a positive perception regarding his college environment, "It is definitely more diverse from where I came from. I think people are more open and outgoing."

These Black males experienced continuity or discontinuity depending on their perceptions of their educational environments. This recognition of the connection between the two environments was critical because it provided a basis from which educational leaders could begin to focus on promoting or creating positive educational environments for Black males. As previously discussed in my conceptual framework, Black males are commonly approached from a deficit standpoint (Dudley-Marling, 2007; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). This deficit approach is embedded in

educational thought and practice but blames Black males or students of color for their own academic failure. As this deficit approach pervades and is embedded in schools, more focus is continuously put toward the negative turnout or troubles that Black males endure. As a result, this negativity gets more attention than the successes of Black males. Researchers Cameron and Caza's (2004) work on positive organizational scholarship explained this point further regarding the focus of negativity. Cameron and Caza explained that more attention is given towards anything negative as opposed to positive. They posited,

Negative phenomena seem to account for more variance, and they are associated, with more dire consequences, than positive phenomena, so they have been the object of more investigations. It takes an intentional concentration on positive phenomena to avoid being inundated by negative phenomena. (p. 736)

Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenaur, and Vohs, (as cited in Cameron and Caza, 2004) further asserted that negative events have a greater impact on people than do positive events. As conferred in my conceptual framework, a deficit approach is commonly used when discussing Black males. This deficit approach highlights the struggles and pitfalls Black males face and is denoted as their reasons for failure. Furthermore, this deficit approach is used against all Black males. Yet, when considering the success of Black males, more focus should be geared toward the positives they experienced while not negating their struggles and pitfalls. Therefore, instead of concentrating on this negativity, educational leaders can begin to focus on promoting or creating an organization or environment that produces resilience and fosters vitality (Cameron & Caza, 2004). By highlighting these positives, educational leaders can begin to move towards a success model for Black males.

*Research Question 2*

How do Black male college students perceive the influence of their educational environments (i.e., high school and college) on their college attendance and achievement?

The second research question addressed Black male college students' perceptions of the influence of their high school and college educational environments on their college attendance and achievement. In the framework of this question, more determinations were made. Black males perceived their environment as a positive and negative influence on their college attendance and achievement. Predicated on the high school environment influencing by college preparation, being pushers towards academic success, and creating or strengthening self-assertion, Black males perceived their environment as positive. The nature of an environment that prepares students for college was perceived as positive by Black males. These Black males perceived their high school environment as being structured towards students attending college. This concurred with Bolman and Deals' (2003) structural frame of leadership. In the structural frame, as Bolman and Deal stated earlier, the structure of an organization was a blueprint for expectations and exchanges among internal members such as educational leaders and students. This structure or blueprint provides the avenues for students to succeed, and without this structure, students can become unsure of their purposes within their schools. This structure or blueprint of expectations could relate to the high schools, high schools that are structured in preparing students for college. For instance these Black male participants perceived their environment as an influence to attend and achieve in college because of the expectations of their high schools. The structure that these high schools

created from these Black males' perspectives provided a foundation that was geared for them to go to college. Thus, these Black males perceived their environment as a stepladder towards their college attendance.

Black males also perceived the environment as “pushers” towards their academic success which helped create or strengthen their self-assertion to want to succeed. The participants expressed how their environment pushed them to succeed due to the enforcement of studying or hearing consistent message to attend college. This conception corresponded with Sergiovanni's (1992) notion of leadership being viewed as an action. Sergiovanni explained that our mindscapes are mental pictures of how the world works, and what we do makes sense if it matches our mindscapes. By educational leaders adopting a mindscape in which their students must attend college, the same mindscape will result in successful actions by students. These high school environments showed these Black males the importance of studying while conveying consistent messages of attending colleges. Thus, Black males' positive perceptions of their high school environments helped influenced them to attend college.

Contrary to these positive perceptions, Black males had negative perceptions of their environment influencing them to attend college. Some Black males negatively perceived their high school environment as an influence to their college attendance due to the lack of school resources. The participants expressed being in an environment that did not promote education or teaching. This impression also related to Bolman and Deal's (2003) structural frame. Bolman and Deal reaffirmed that people become unsure about what they are supposed to be doing when structure is lacking. This lack of structure can

cause schools to underperform in their academic endeavors with regard to their school expectations and, as a result may cause the students to struggle academically. For the Black male participants, this lack of structure related to their non-promoting or non-teaching environment. For example, Black males perceived their libraries as a place for social gatherings as opposed to a place for academic engagement. In addition, they perceived their classrooms as places that focused on disciplined behavior as opposed to a place of teaching. Because of these Black males' perceptions, their high school environment negatively influenced their college attendance.

As these Black males began to attend college, some of the high school perceptions remained constant to their college environment. Some of the Black males perceived their college environment from a self-assertion perspective. These Black males expressed how their college environment created their drive and will to succeed and that their performance depended on their effort. This perception related to researchers Rascoe and Atwater's (2005) work on Black males' self-perceptions. Rascoe and Atwater previously asserted that Black male students perceived their academic ability in terms of what they would do to achieve academically. They further posited that their self perception influenced their academic performance. The participants explained that in order for them to succeed in college, they had to take the initiative. They also stated that they could not rely on anyone to be successful. Due to their college environment creating or strengthening their self-assertion for their achievement, Black males viewed their environment as positive.

Even though some Black males revealed positive perceptions regarding their college environment influencing their achievement, others expressed negative perceptions. These negative perceptions related to Black males feeling the need to impress their educational leaders. These participants expressed the perception of having to prove to their educational leaders that they are just as educated as other students. Furthermore, these Black males felt their educational leaders had preconceived stereotypical notions about them. This perception was in accordance with Gay's (2003) principles of practice of being a multicultural educator. Gay explained that an analysis and reflection on personal experience with ethnic cultural diversity must take place as a means of multicultural education. Gay posited that for a multicultural existence, educational leaders must engage in their own assumptions about race, class, and gender. Some of the Black males previously discussed their perception of having to impress their educational leaders. This need to impress was to combat their professors' preconceived notions of Black people being lethargic or uneducated. Therefore, these Black males' perceptions of their college environment negatively influenced their achievement.

The Black male participants also exhibited continuity or discontinuity regarding their positive and negative perceptions from their high school and college environments influencing their college attendance and achievement. Some Black males exhibited continuity because they perceived their high school environment as a positive influence on their college attendance and also perceived their college environment as positive for influencing their achievement. For instance, Kurt previously expressed this statement about his environment, "They [Educational Leaders] would say the life is better, you are

on your own [At college], and you are away from your parents. I was like, that was cool; I want to be a part of that.” Next to this positive perception of his high school, he expressed this positive perception about his college environment influencing his college achievement, “College success depends on you. If you want to succeed or be like the top student in your class, you have to go out and do it.” Jason displayed discontinuity because he perceived certain elements of his high school environment as positive but perceived his college environment as negative. Jason stated, “If you are not going to teach me, I might as well teach myself.” Regarding his college environment, he stated, “I have to say that I notice a lot of racial prejudice even between professors and students, whereas they are probably more attentive to other students than they would with Black students.”

These Black males revealed continuity or discontinuity depending on their perceptions of the influence of their educational environments. As previously stated, this identification of the connection between the two environments is critical because it provides a starting point where educational leaders can begin to focus on creating positive educational environments that influences Black male college attendance and achievement. Continuity and discontinuity were displayed between the high school and college educational environments influencing these Black males college attendance and achievement. Although negativity was displayed, discontinuity should not be the main focus. Continuing to focus solely on the negativity Black males endure will continue to create discontinuity while continuing to denote Black males as being the problem. Per my conceptual framework, Perry et al. (2003) noted that educational leaders cannot continue

to support ideologies and practices that hinder students. In addition, Kretovics and Nussel (1994), Persell (1997), and Solorzano (1997) stated that deficit approaches from professionally trained teachers give a minuscule speculation of why Black males struggle in college. As a result of this diminutive assumption, the continued deficit approaches are perpetuated, and the negative aspects of Black males continue to be highlighted as opposed to the successes of Black males. Researchers Luthans and Youssef's (2007) work on positive organizational behavior discussed further this point of moving away from the deficit approach and moving towards positivity. Luthans and Youssef expressed the importance of focusing more on positive components within organizations while still considering the negatives. They explained that there is a need for a more balanced approach that takes into consideration the positive as well as the negative, but builds on the strengths while correcting weaknesses. They also stated that positively oriented organizations and behaviors may have a positive impact on performances and desired outcomes beyond deficit-oriented approaches.

As my conceptual framework illustrated, the deficit model is the common approach for discussing Black males. This deficit approach emphasizes the struggles and pitfalls of Black males, but it negates the successes that Black males do experience. Unfortunately, this deficit approach is used against all Black males who are successful as well as those who may need more attention. Therefore, when considering the success of Black males, more effort needs to be geared toward the positives in which they encounter while still giving attention to hardships they face. Luthans and Youssef (2007) further posited, "An integrative approach is necessary for a fuller understanding of the dynamics

of success and failure in today's flat-world environment" (p. 323). As my conceptual framework explained, more attention should be geared towards the success of Black males. This approach does not totally negate the negative aspects of Black males' lives, but the success approach shifts the attention from negative to positive. This shift can start a movement with educational leaders focusing on the success of Black males as opposed to the commonly researched detriments.

### *Research Question 3*

How do Black male college students perceive the influence of educational leaders (i.e., high school and college) on their college attendance and achievement?

The third research question illuminated Black males college students' perceptions of the influence of educational leaders in high school and college on their college attendance and achievement. In the structure of this question, certain conclusions were made. Black males perceived their educational leaders as having positive and negative influences on their college attendance and achievement. Black males perceived their educational leaders positively influencing their college attendance and achievement due to their leaders preparing them for college, being constructive leaders, and pushing them to succeed. Being influenced by educational leaders who had higher expectations challenged them to take ownership, have an intellectual connection, and be authentic. Their role models affirmed their positive perceptions of their high school educational leaders. The attributes of these leaders related to Bass' (1998) ideas on transformational leadership. Bass mentioned earlier that transformational leaders stimulate their followers' efforts to be innovative and creative, provide meaning and challenge their workers, and,

more importantly, followers identify with the leaders and want to emulate them. In addition, researchers Avolio and Gardner (2005) focused on authentic leadership and explained that being authentic provided the impetus for followers to be more engaged. They explained that for leaders and followers to be successful, leaders must promote an organizational climate that enables themselves as well as followers to grow. Furthermore, Polite and Davis (1999) echoed similar sentiments as Bass and Avolio and Gardner regarding Black males. Polite and Davis previously noted that Black males considered their best teachers those who respected them, inspired them to work hard, and made learning interesting and relevant. As some of the Black males shared, their teachers challenged them regarding certain assignments. Moreover, their teachers challenged them to use what they had learned from one class to the next. Based on these attributes, Black males perceived their educational leaders as an influence to attending college.

Equally to these positive perceptions, Black males had negative perceptions of their educational leaders influencing their college attendance. Some Black males perceived their high school educational leaders negatively regarding their college attendance due to the leaders' focus on making money and not being teachers. This notion related to Bolman and Deal's (2003) human resource frame. Bolman and Deal previously stated that students' needs must be met, and they must feel respected and a part of the school in order for them to perform at a high-quality level. In this human resource frame, according to Bolman and Deal, educational leaders must provide sufficient resources for the success of their students. Some of the Black male participants expressed that their administrative leaders were only concerned about bringing in revenue

for their schools and not focusing on the educational component. Other Black males explained that their teachers only gave attention to the disciplinary behaviors and not teaching students. Based on these Black males not receiving sufficient resources or not feeling a part of their school, they negatively perceived their high school educational leaders.

As college students, some of the Black males positively perceived their college educational leaders as having an influence on them to achieve in college. These perceptions were based on the educational leaders being helpful, interactive, and engaging. This concept also related to Bolman and Deal's (2003) human resource frame. Bolman and Deal explained that a leader is responsive, supportive, shows concerns, listens to aspirations, and communicates personal warmth and openness to his or her students. Bolman and Deal additionally noted that a human resource leader works on behalf of the organization and its people to serve the best interest of both. This assertion from Bolman and Deal connected with some of the Black male perceptions. For instance, these Black males expressed having educational leaders who were welcoming role models and who were willing to provide assistance. In addition, these Black males acknowledged that if their professors want to offer help, the students have to be willing to take the initiative to interact with their professors. Considering the comments of Black males, they perceived their educational leaders as influencing their college achievement.

As these Black males experienced constructive educational leaders, others viewed them as negative, deconstructive leaders. These Black males perceived them as deconstructive due to the educational leaders only being concerned with getting a

paycheck or only being focused on their research. This perception related to Bolman and Deal's (2003) political frame. Bolman and Deal commented earlier about power creating conflict within an organization. They explained that if there were interdependency among members, i.e., members needed one another, this tended to create power relationships. Furthermore, they explained how this power can affect members of the organization. These points from Bolman and Deal related to these Black males as they expressed their educational leaders concern was collecting a paycheck and conducting their research and not focusing on their students. Students are in classes expecting to be taught and the professors have the power to choose whether or not to pay more attention to their research as opposed to the students. Thus, this power dynamic may negatively affect these Black males. Therefore, due to this display of power, these Black males revealed negative perceptions regarding their educational leaders.

These Black males revealed a level of continuity regarding their perceptions of their high school educational leaders and college educational leaders. Some Black males showed continuity as they perceived their high school educational leaders as a positive influence on their college attendance and also perceived their college educational leaders as positive for influencing their achievement. For example, Colin previously made this statement about his high school educational leader, "She [Advisor] was on the ball, asking what colleges I have applied to, informing me of what scholarships that were available, and was always telling me that I need to take care of certain paperwork quickly." In relation to this positive perception of his high school educational leader, he expressed a positive perception about his college educational leader influencing his

college achievement, “The professors here take their time, they explain things, they care how you do, they actually try and make or help you understand, their office hours are a great idea, and they are there for you.”

The acknowledgment of this connection between the two environments of educational leaders afforded a preparatory stage in which educational leaders can begin to establish positive educational environments which can influence Black male college attendance and achievement. Educational leaders play a critical role in creating and focusing on this positive trajectory from high school to college for Black males. Researchers Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, and Ray (2004) shared similar thoughts about creating positive cultures from their studies on authentic leaders. They defined authentic leaders as individuals who were able to enhance the engagement, motivation, commitment, satisfaction, and involvement required from followers to constantly improve their work and performance. They furthered this notion of improving work and performance with this statement, “Authentic leaders create the conditions for higher trust and elicit positive emotions from followers, enhancing decision making, improving the well-being of organizations, and ultimately building positive emotional states and high levels of engagement throughout the workforce” (p. 813). In relation to the educational environment, through authentic leadership, educational leaders can begin to create a culture that encourages their followers’ diverse viewpoints to act in the best interests of their followers. As presented in my conceptual framework, Polite and Davis (1999) mentioned that effective teachers of Black males possess some necessary tools (i.e., emotional stamina, persistence, and resilience) to help their students manage

setbacks and misfortunes. Some of the Black males explained that the authenticity of the teachers showed their credibility. These Black males felt more of a connection with authentic teachers. Therefore, with this authentic focus within educational environments and as educational leaders are becoming more effective towards Black males, Black males may begin to connect more with their educational leaders.

### Conclusion

Researchers have commonly approached Black males as a monolithic group; a group that thinks, acts, and views education similarly. In addition, Black males have frequently been studied from a deficit perspective in which they are the blame for their struggles, hardships, and academic failure. Although these common approaches have laid a foundation in determining the failure of Black males, the findings from this study provided an avenue in which researchers can begin to approach Black males from a different standpoint; a success standpoint when discussing the achievement of Black male college students.

Instead of perpetuating the deficit thinking perspective, I approached this study from a success standpoint to highlight those successful Black males who are attending and achieving in college. This study and the findings demonstrated a concentrated effort to acknowledge those successful Black males attending and achieving in college. The findings highlighted Black males positive perceptions of their high school and college environments and educational leaders. These positive perceptions displayed a different reality which is often overlooked by researchers, educational leaders, and educational institutions. The success stories of these Black male participants afford the opportunity in

which researchers, educational leaders, educational institutions can learn and use in their approaches with Black male students. Furthermore, the findings revealed negative experiences; however, these Black males were able to persevere and succeed despite these negative incidents. Moreover, instead of only viewing these negative experiences as impediments, these occurrences can also be viewed as a positive influence towards the success of Black males.

When discussing Black male students, deficit thinking needs to become success thinking. Although the struggles, hardships, and academic failures are the experiences of some Black males, the success of Black males is also a reality. This success thinking needs to become a sense of agency within educational institutions and amongst educational leaders. This action needs to take priority over deficit thinking in high school and college environments in an afforded effort to assist with increasing Black males' attendance and achievement in college. The negative experiences of Black males should not be negated as these occurrences provide an understanding of how to offer assistance for these students. Yet, an equal balance of positive and negative experiences of Black males needs to transpire. While deficit thinking has been the recurrent approach in researching Black males, the preeminence of success thinking needs to become the focal point. This success thinking may transcend educational leaders' common deficit way of thinking in an afforded endeavor to create positive environments from negative environments in their efforts to increase and highlight the forgotten success reality of Black males attendance and achievement in college.

Black male college students are still a group that will receive continued attention from researchers and scholars regarding their plights. The magnitude of their complex struggles regarding their decline in attending college has been researched on many levels (Cross & Slater, 2000; Kaba, 2005; Kaiser, 2006). Researching the struggles or hardships of Black males gets immediate attention because of its greater impact on people. Cameron and Caza (2004) explained earlier that negative phenomena account for more variance and have been the object of more variance. Furthermore, to focus on the positive phenomena, it takes an intentional concentration to avoid being inundated by negative phenomena. The challenge for educational leaders to be responsible for being positive educational leaders and creating positive educational environments for these Black males is essential. Constructive teachers who are equipped with multicultural perspectives are needed. Given the numerous problems faced by Black males, it is imperative to note that Black males are not a monolithic group (Harper, 2006). Despite the fact that there is much research regarding the struggles of Black males, these males should be considered by their differences before conducting research. This research study provided a step in the direction of disaggregating similarities and differences of Black males and not focusing only on the trials and tribulations of Black males not succeeding in college. Although this study focused on the success of Black males, it revealed negative components that Black males have faced. It is important to note that ignoring the negative experiences or perceptions of Black males could be a disservice to these students. Dudley-Marling (2007) stated earlier that educational leaders should not separate students' background knowledge, culture, and experiences because they may help with the students' success.

The negative perceptions that were revealed were important to recognize because they blended with some of the positive perceptions. However, the premise of this study was not to focus on negativity. Despite focusing on the positives in this study, the negative perceptions that were revealed were important to recognize.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research are detailed below.

1. This research study was limited to one PWI in the Southwest. The sample size consisted of 21 Black male undergraduates. A broader sample across different universities including graduate students is a recommendation.
2. This data collection was during the summer months when the majority of Black males were not attending classes. Collecting data while Black males are taking classes could potentially bring about different perspectives.
3. This research study focused on Black male college students' perceptions their educational environment and the role of educational leaders. A comparative analysis between males and females is a recommendation.
4. This research study included international participants. A future study comparing Black males and international students who identify as Black could be warranted.
5. A longitudinal study regarding Black male perceptions from when they were freshmen to when they become seniors could determine some trends, similarities, or differences.

## APPENDIX A: EMAIL MESSAGE

An Analysis of Successful Black Male College Students Perceptions on Their  
Educational Environment and the Role of Educational Leaders

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Professor John L. Taylor in the College of Education, Department of Educational Leadership at The University of Arizona. I am conducting a research study to analyze Black male college students perceptions on their educational environment and the role educational leaders play in their attendance and achievement in college.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve an audio digital recorded interview taking 45 minutes to an hour of your time. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time. I am requesting that you read, complete, and return the attached Informed Consent form if you accept my invitation to participate in the study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty, nor will it affect your current or future status as a student. The results of the study may be published; however, your name will not be used.

All interview data will be kept locked up and secured and will be destroyed immediately after the conclusion of this study.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (520) 621-1892 or Dr. John Taylor at (520) 626-7933. You can also contact The University of Arizona if you have additional questions. The contact information is at the end of the Inform Consent form.

Sincerely,

Kevin Dougherty  
Doctoral Student

## APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT FLYER

# **Black Male College Students Needed**

- FOR A DOCTORAL RESEARCH STUDY
- FOCUS IS ON BLACK MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERS
- MUST BE 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER
- MUST BE A FRESHMAN, SOPHOMORE, JUNIOR, OR SENIOR (BASE ON CREDITS AND/OR YEARS)
- CAN NOT BE A CURRENT INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETE
- ONLY 45 MINUTES TO AN HOUR OF YOUR TIME IS NEEDED
- HELP UNDERSTAND HOW TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF BLACK MALE COLLEGE STUDENT ENROLLMENT

If you are able to participate please contact

Kevin Dougherty for more information

The University of Arizona

[dougherty@life.arizona.edu](mailto:dougherty@life.arizona.edu)

520-621-1892

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interview questions were designed to elicit responses related to each student's demographic information and their perceptions of their high schools, college, and educational leaders. The listed interview questions were not exclusive to each interview. Although each question was used, certain responses may have warranted more probing questions. In the case that more information was necessary, "(Probe)" is listed.

#### *Demographic Information*

The following questions explored brief information regarding Black males' demographics.

1. Tell me about yourself.
  - a. Where are you from? (Probe)
  - b. How old are you?
  - c. What is your class standing?
2. How do you self identify? (African American, Black, etc.)
  - a. Discuss the rationale behind your choice.
3. Did you always know that you were going to college?
  - a. How did you know? (Probe)
  - b. When did you know? (Probe)
4. What led to your interest in attending college?

*Perceptions of Educational Environment in High School*

The following questions explored information regarding Black males perceptions on their educational environment in high school.

5. What were your perceptions of your high school environment? (Probe).
6. From your perspective, how would you describe the student body? (Probe)
7. From your perspective, how did you fit into your high school student body? Explain. (Probe).
8. How did your perception of your high school affect your academic success? (Probe)
9. How did your high school experience influence your decision to attend college? (Probe)

*Perceptions of Educational Leaders in High School*

The following questions explored information regarding Black males perceptions on their educational leaders in high school.

10. What was your perception of educational leaders in your high school? (Probe)
11. From your perspective, what role did these educational leaders play in your decision to attend college? (Probe)
12. Did these educational leaders provide opportunities in high school that prompted your process to college? Explain. (Probe)
13. From your perspective, what skills did you learn from these educational leaders that aided your decision to attend college? (Probe)

*Perceptions of Educational Environment in College*

The following questions explored information regarding Black males perceptions on the college educational environment.

14. What are your perceptions of your college environment? (Probe)
15. From your perception, how would you describe the student population on campus? (Probe)
16. From your perception, how do you fit into the student population? Explain. (Probe)
17. How do your perceptions of college affect your achievement in college? (Probe)

*Perceptions of Educational Leaders in College*

The following questions explored information regarding Black males perceptions on their educational leaders in college.

18. What is your perception of educational leaders in college? (Probe)
19. From your perception, what role do these educational leaders play in your achievement in college? (Probe)
20. Do these educational leaders provide opportunities in college that assist in your achievement? Explain. (Probe)
21. From your perception, what skills are you learning from these educational leaders that assist in your achievement in college? (Probe)

## APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

## Informed Consent

An Analysis of Successful Black Male College Students Perceptions on Their Educational Environment and the Role of Educational Leaders**Introduction**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. Study personnel will be available to answer your questions and provide additional information. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. A copy of this form will be given to you.

**What is the purpose of this research study?**

You are invited to participate voluntarily in the above-titled research project. The purpose of this project is to investigate Black male college students perceptions of their educational environments and the role educational leaders play in their attendance and achievement in college.

**Why are you being asked to participate?**

You are being invited because you are a freshmen, sophomore, junior, or senior Black male, 18 years of age or older, and attending The University of Arizona.

**How many people will be asked to participate in this study?**

Approximately 20 people will be asked to participate in this study.

**What will happen during this study?**

Participants will be asked to answer questions in an interview conducted by the Principal Investigator (PI). The interviews will be audio-recorded and take place in the preferred location of the participants. However, the PI will use his office if the participant can not determine a location to conduct the interview. To seek further clarification regarding the data from the interviews, the researcher will need to contact the participants.

**How long will I be in this study?**

About 45 minutes to an hour will be needed to complete this study.

**Are there any risks to me?**

The interview questions you will be answering do not include any significant risks. Although we have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions I ask will be stressful or upsetting. If this occurs, you may stop participating immediately. I can give you information about individuals who may assist you with these difficulties.

**Are there any benefits to me?**

You will not receive any direct benefits from taking part in this study. Your participation will help provide information regarding Black males perceptions of the educational environment and the role educational leaders played in their attendance and achievement in college.

**Will there be any costs to me?**

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

**Will I be paid to participate in the study?**

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

**Will video or audio recordings be made of me during the study?**

I will have an audio recorder during the study so that we can be certain that your responses are recorded accurately only if you check the box below:

I give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

I do not give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

**Will the information that is obtained from me be kept confidential?**

The only persons who will know that you participated in this study will be the research team members: Advisors, Dr. John L. Taylor and Dr. Jenny Lee, and the Principal Investigator, Kevin Anthony Dougherty. Representatives of regulatory agencies, including The University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program, may access your records.

Your records will be confidential. You will not be identified in any reports or publications resulting from the study

**May I change my mind about participating?**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide to not begin or to stop the study at any time. Your refusing to participate will have no effect on your status as a student.

**Whom can I contact for additional information?**

You can obtain further information about the research or voice concerns or complaints about the research by calling the Principal Investigator Kevin Dougherty at (520) 621-1892. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research participant, have general questions, concerns or complaints or would like to give input about the research and can't reach the research team, or want to talk to someone other than the research team, you may call the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program office at (520) 626-6721. (If out of state use the toll-free number 1-866-278-1455.) If you would like to contact the Human Subjects Protection Program via the web, please visit the following website: <http://www.irb.arizona.edu/contact/>.

**Your Signature**

By signing this form, I affirm that I have read the information contained in the form, that the study has been explained to me, that my questions have been answered and that I agree to take part in this study. I do not give up any of my legal rights by signing this form.

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 Name (Printed)

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 Participant's Signature

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 Date signed
**Statement by person obtaining consent**

I certify that I have explained the research study to the person who has agreed to participate, and that he or she has been informed of the purpose, the procedures, the possible risks and potential benefits associated with participation in this study. Any questions raised have been answered to the participant's satisfaction.

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 Name of study personnel

---

 Study personnel Signature

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 Date signed

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