

**PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF SOCIETAL DISSONANCE, SELF-EFFICACY,  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE MENTORSHIP, AND INSTITUTIONAL  
SUPPORT ON THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MALES IN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION OF HIGHER  
EDUCATION: AN INSTITUTIONAL CASE STUDY**

A Dissertation

by

RONALD W. BROWN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

August 2008

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Bryan Cole
Committee Members,	Fred Bonner
	Christine Stanley
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## ABSTRACT

Perceived Influence of Societal Dissonance, Self-Efficacy, African American Male Mentorship, and Institutional Support on the Academic Success of African American Males in a Predominantly White Institution of Higher Education: An Institutional Case Study. (August 2008)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Bryan Cole

For the past decade the attainment gap in college admission and graduation rates between Black males and their White counterparts has continued to grow. A growing body of research has held that there is a negative correlation between educational attainment and the decline of the Black family structure. As the structure of the Black family has deteriorated due to the lack of a male presence, so have participation rates in higher education for African American males. It is established that environmental and cultural factors have a profound influence on human behaviors, including academic performance. What is less understood is how environmental and cultural factors influence the way in which Black males come to perceive education and how those perceptions influence not only their behavior but their performance in school. It is unknown why being African American and male causes this segment of the population to stand out in the most negative and disheartening ways, both in school and in society. This study measures the perceived influence of four factors (societal dissonance, self-efficacy, African American male mentorship, and institutional support) on the academic success of African American male students at a predominantly White institution of higher education.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my family: to my mother Linda and her unwavering support and undeniable belief in me; to my father Kenny and his wife Algeria and the relationship that we have built over the years; to my brother Eric, who is actually one of the inspirations of this study; and, to my sister Tanisa, whom I love dearly.

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There are many challenges in life. Some, such as this dissertation, we choose; others are thrust upon us. I gladly accept the responsibility that goes with the completion of a doctoral degree and will lead by example. Mahatma Gandhi said, “We must *be* the change we wish to see in the world.” I will continue to illuminate the ills and injustices in this world so that those without a voice can be heard and not passed over.

Nothing in a simple paragraph can express my sincere appreciation for those who were there to support and encourage me throughout my academic journey, more specifically Dave Rozeboom, Brady Dennis, Brian Dickens. Loai Tzu said, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.” This is but the beginning of my journey. You have not seen the last of me; that I promise you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	iii
DEDICATION .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	3
Purpose of the Study .....	4
Operational Definitions .....	5
Significance of the Study .....	7
II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
The Male Minority .....	8
Status of the Black Male, 2007 .....	8
Academic Underachievement.....	10
Scarcity of African American Male Teachers .....	11
Incarceration of African American Males .....	13
Societal Barriers for African American Males.....	14
Racial Segregation .....	15
Negative Stereotypes .....	16
The Influence of Affirmative Action .....	20
Impact of Affirmative Action on Students .....	25
The Spellings Report and Accessibility for Black Males .....	27
Perceptions of African American Men From a Research Perspective .....	31
Epistemological Racism .....	31
Possible Factors That Generate Academic Success.....	35
Societal Dissonance .....	36
Self-Efficacy .....	37
The Cross Theory of Nigrescence .....	41
Africentric Resistance Model .....	42
Erikson’s Identity Development Model.....	43
Bandura’s Social Learning Model .....	43
Where Have Our Black Heroes Gone? .....	44
Mentoring.....	45
Institutional Support.....	49

CHAPTER	Page
III THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY .....	53
Naturalistic Inquiry .....	53
Theoretical Framework .....	54
Research Design .....	54
Instrumentation .....	57
Participants and Selection .....	58
Observations .....	62
Data Analysis .....	63
Unitizing Data .....	64
Identifying Themes .....	64
Trustworthiness .....	65
Credibility .....	66
Dependability .....	68
Limitations of the Study .....	72
The Role of the Researcher .....	73
Summary .....	73
IV DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS .....	75
Analysis of the Data .....	75
The Study Institution .....	75
Online Survey Contribution .....	78
Summary of the Interview Categories .....	79
The Interviewee Descriptions .....	81
Andrew .....	81
Colin .....	84
Damian .....	86
Jesse .....	88
Justin .....	91
Saviour .....	93
Wayne .....	96
Summary .....	99
Addressing the Research Questions .....	99
Research Question 1 .....	99
Analysis for Research Question 1 .....	103
Research Question 2 .....	105
Analysis for Research Question 2 .....	107
Research Question 3 .....	108
Analysis for Research Question 3 .....	111
Research Question 4 .....	113
Analysis for Research Question 4 .....	115
Cross-Case Analysis .....	116
Critical Race Theory and the Research Questions .....	117
CRT and Research Question 1 .....	118
CRT and Research Question 2 .....	119
CRT and Research Question 3 .....	119
CRT and Research Question 4 .....	120
Additional Findings .....	122

CHAPTER	Page
V	
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	125
Overview of the Study .....	125
Discussion of the Findings .....	127
Research Question 1 .....	127
Research Question 2 .....	128
Research Question 3 .....	129
Research Question 4 .....	131
Cross-Case Analysis .....	132
Conclusion.....	133
Implications for Practice .....	136
Recommendations for Practice.....	139
Societal Dissonance .....	139
Self-Efficacy .....	141
Mentoring.....	142
Institutional Support .....	145
Institutional Behavioral Change.....	147
Early Intervention Programs .....	150
Faculty of Color .....	151
Teaching Strategies for Faculty.....	152
Moving Beyond the Deficit Perspective.....	154
Recommendations for Further Research .....	156
Closing Thoughts .....	158
REFERENCES .....	162
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	174
APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT PROFILE FORM.....	177
APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM.....	179
APPENDIX D: SEDLACEK’S VARIABLES OF MOTIVATION AND PERSISTENCE .....	181
APPENDIX E: COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS AIMED AT YOUNG BLACK MEN.....	183
APPENDIX F: BLACK FACULTY DEMOGRAPHICS .....	186
APPENDIX G: SUGGESTIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEM.....	188
VITA .....	190



**LIST OF TABLES**

TABLE	Page
1. Relationships of Participants and Their Parents .....	61
2. Strategies Used in the Study to Ensure Trustworthiness of the Findings: Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability .....	70
3. Strategies Used in the Study to Ensure General Trustworthiness of the Findings.....	71
4. Characteristics of Data Collection Methods Used in the Study.....	72
5. Linkages of Interview Themes and Research Questions (RQ).....	81
6. Linkages Between Research Questions (RQ) Resulting From Cross-Case Analysis .....	118

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In today's society a high school dropout is 4 times more likely than a college graduate to be unemployed. He or she will earn nearly 60% less than his/her college-educated counterpart and will be half as likely to take part in the democratic process by casting a vote. He or she will be half as likely as high-school educated peers to feel in good health. He or she is 2.5 times more likely than a high school graduate to be arrested. Such statistics highlight the connection between education and social mobility and may help to explain why 82% of the inmates in the criminal justice system are dropouts (Bedsworth, Colby, & Doctor, 2006) and 40% of all prisoners in the system are Black males (Gordon, 1999).

Although the plight of the Black male in American society has been well documented by scholars and practitioners (W.R. Allen, 1992; Becker & Becker, 2003; Bonner, 2003; M.C. Brown, & Davis, 2001; Cook, 1998; Cox, Matthews, and Associates, 1993; Delpit, 1996; Diop, 2004; Faison, 1995; Fashola, 2005; Fleming, 1984; Harper, 2003; Harris, 1996; Howell & Egley, 2005; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Kunjufu, 1984; LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1987; Lee, 2000; Morgan, 1996; Tatum, 1997; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; Weatherspoon, 2005; Whiting, 2006), few reports have adequately addressed the issues of Black males and the troubled journey into higher education through their perspective. In the United States, Black males represent only 6% of the population but about 40% of the prison population. Moreover, the number of Black males in prison and jail exceeds the number of Black males in higher education (Gordon, 1999): *The Funding of Higher Education and Corrections*

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This dissertation follows the style and format of *The Journal of Educational Research*.

*and Its Impact on African American Men* reports that, while 603,000 Black men were in college in 2001, in the same year 791,600 Black men were imprisoned (Hocker, 2002).

Statistics reported by the U.S. Department of Justice for 2001 indicated that 179,500 African American men ages 18-24 were in prison and jail. Therefore, in the 18- to 24-year-old group, the ratio of those in college versus those imprisoned for African American males was 2.6:1; for their White male counterparts, the ratio was 28:1. In 2000 there were 3,522,392 White men ages 18 to 24 enrolled in college, which represents 32.8% of that age group, while 125,700 White men were in prison in 2001 (Hocker, 2002). According to Byron Price (2006), a Rutgers University professor citing data from his book *Merchandizing Prisoners: Who Really Pays for Prison Privatization?* showed that, by 2020, if the current trends continue, the United States will have more African American men in prison than there were during slavery.

Although these statistics appear bleak, some African American men are achieving success despite the influence of social barriers. Malcolm B. Williams, program manager for student support services at Morehouse College, pointed to strategies that have shown success among African American males; many of these strategies, such as mentoring and tutoring, can be considered support services (Pluiose, 2005). According to Williams,

Intrusive counseling is how you connect with African American young men. In the 21st century, these young men come to the academic environment with incredible degrees of distraction and more often than not, without the tools in the toolbox that are going to help them navigate the first two years of the environment. . . . The only way to connect with these young men is by identifying staffers who are committed to the process and who have the passion to take the time to do the work required to connect with somebody's son. (as cited in Pluiose, p. 3)

The obstacles to African American males earning college degrees are many, some appear to be immovable. These obstacles include an inferior public education, the absence of African American men as role models, low expectations from teachers and

other adults, low self-esteem, their own low aspirations, and their tendency to drop out of high school in disproportionate numbers (W.R.Allen, 1992; X.M. Allen, 2000; Astin, 1984; Becker & Becker, 2003; Brewer, 1990; Cox, Matthews, and Associates, 1993; Cross, 1991; Delpit, 1996; Faison, 1995; Kunjufu, 1984; Maxwell, 2004).

### **Statement of the Problem**

For the past decade the attainment gap in college admission and graduation rates between Black males and their White counterparts has continued to grow despite the best efforts of researchers interested in identifying the root cause and possible policy remedies for these declines (Becker & Becker, 2003). The scarcity of Black male students in higher education has created a great deal of concern for the country socially, economically, educationally, and culturally (Cook, 1998). A growing body of researchers (X.M. Allen, 2000; Gray, 1995) have identified a direct correlation between educational attainment and the decline of the Black family structure. As the structure of the Black family has deteriorated from the lack of a male presence, so have participation rates in higher education for African American males deteriorated (Cook). A correlation between the educational performance of African American males and the hardships that they endure within the larger society is not surprising (X.M.Allen; Astin, 1984; Becker & Becker; Brewer, 1990; Coleman et al., 1966; Cross, 1991; Kunjufu, 1984; Maxwell, 2004).

Scholars and researchers (e.g., Brookover & Erickson, 1969; Morrow & Torres, 1995) have agreed that environmental and cultural factors have a profound influence on human behaviors, including academic performance. What is less understood is how environmental and cultural factors influence the way in which Black males come to perceive education and how those perceptions influence not only their behavior but their performance in school as well.

There is considerable evidence that the ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds of students have bearing on how students are perceived and treated by the adults who work with them within schools (Becker & Becker, 2003; Brookover & Erickson, 1969; Carey & Forsyth, 2007; Maxwell, 2004; Morrow & Torres, 1995). However, less is known about the specific nature of the perceptions and expectations that are held for Black males and how these may affect their performance not only within schools but within society. There is a continuing question of why being African American and male causes this segment of the population to stand out in the most negative and disheartening ways, both in school and in society.

Set within this paradigm, four research questions were developed to address four issues that have been acknowledged to be possible obstacles for Black males trying to complete a 4-year degree at a predominantly White institution.

1. What is the perceived influence of societal dissonance on the African American male's academic success?
2. What is the perceived influence of self-efficacy on the African American male's academic success?
3. What is the perceived influence of African American male mentorship on the African American male's academic success?
4. What is the perceived influence of institutional support on the African American male's academic success?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived influence of societal dissonance, self-efficacy, African American mentorship, and institutional support on the academic success of seven academically successful African American male undergraduate students at a predominantly White institution of higher education. This

was done by examining the students' self-efficacy, support structure, and academic background, guided by the research questions.

This study explores the extent to which American academia has addressed the issue of African American males and their troubled journey into higher education. It is meant to add to the literature on African American male populations regarding their experiences in predominantly White institutions.

Through the experiences of the participants, the study provides insight into issues of societal perception, persistence, support, and access through the perspective of African American males. This study was developed to provide a contextual understanding of African American males in higher education and provide those who work with the African American male populations in higher education, as well as in K-12 settings, insight to Black males from their perspective. The findings may be used to assist institutions of higher education in the recruitment and retention of African American males by providing strategies and recommendations (see Chapter V).

### **Operational Definitions**

The following terms are operationally defined for use in this study.

*African American/Black male*: U.S.-born citizen of African ancestry (Caribbeans, native Africans, and other international students of color were excluded from the sample, as their college experiences may tend to differ from those of their U.S.-born Black counterparts (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

*Enriching educational experiences*: Educational programs, groups, or classes that have made the college experience fuller, more meaningful, or more rewarding to the student (Oxford College, 2003).

*European American/White American*: U.S.-born citizen of European ancestry, native to or derived from Europe, generally following traditional European customs and

speaking a European language; commonly referred to as a White person or Caucasian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

*High-achieving/success:* Describing the undergraduate (junior or senior) African American male student who (a) has earned a cumulative grade point average above 3.0 on a 4.0 scale, (b) has established a consistent record of involvement in multiple campus organizations, (c) has developed quality relationships with faculty and staff, and (d) has participated in enriching educational experiences (e.g., study abroad programs, internships, or summer research programs).

*Institutional support:* Access to resources, information, services, and staff that are provided to African American male students.

*Junior:* A student in an American university or college participating in the class, generally the third year or just below that of the senior.

*Mentee:* A person who is guided by a mentor (Thomas, 1989).

*Mentor:* A person who provides guidance and recommendations to a more junior person for courses of action and behavior; a person who serves as a teacher or trusted counselor (Thomas, 1989).

*Predominantly White institution:* An institution of higher education with an enrollment of more than 50% White students.

*Self-efficacy:* A person's estimate or personal judgment of his or her own ability to succeed in reaching a specific goal (e.g., quitting smoking or losing weight) or a more general goal (e.g., continuing to remain at a prescribed weight level; (Hughes & Demo, 1989).

*Senior:* A student in an American university or college participating in the fourth, and generally final, year of school.

*Societal dissonance*: Inconsistency in attitudes, based on the psychological construct of cognitive dissonance (tension emerging from awareness of two inconsistent thoughts or cognitions; Festinger, 1957) but applied at a societal level. This study applies the concept from a societal perspective.

### **Significance of the Study**

It has been shown that African American males underperform academically in higher education (Moore, as cited in Jones, 2001). The present study attempts to identify barriers that African American males face in achieving success at a predominantly White institution of higher education. Relatively little theory has been developed from the authentic perspective of African American males concerning the influence of societal dissonance, self-efficacy, African American male mentorship, or institutional support on the academic success of African American male students. This study was designed to develop an improved understanding of these four factors on the success of African Americans males in college, contribute to the scant literature on African American males, offer critical insight, and present recommendations to administrators, staff, and faculty of predominantly White institutions. The findings of this study are intended to contribute to the body of literature and theory on African American males in higher education. Likewise, it may inform higher education administrators about how to address the issues of recruitment and retention of African American males. Furthermore, this study is intended to assist faculty and staff in gaining greater knowledge of how to assist African American males to negotiate the academic and social barriers while adapting to a predominantly White institution.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **The Male Minority**

Until 1979, men made up the majority of college students. However, as women won increasing equality elsewhere in society, it was only a matter of time before they reached equality and exceeded men in the participation rates concerning college, which they did by the early 1980s. Over the past several decades the percentage of men in colleges and universities in the United States has slowly slipped to 44% of the undergraduate population (Fonda, 2000), and the gender gap is growing at campuses across America. Federal projections predict that the percentage of male undergraduates will shrink to as little as 42% by 2010 (Norfolk State University, 2005).

According to Mortenson (2001), an education analyst in Oskaloosa, Iowa, the share of college degrees earned by males has been declining for decades. Figures from the U.S. government show that, from 1970 to 1996, as the number of Bachelor's degrees earned by women increased by 77%, the number earned by men rose only 19%.

#### **State of the Black Male, 2007**

According to research (LaVant et al., 1987; Tatum, 1997; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003), Black men are more underrepresented in higher education than White, Latino, or Asian males. Although men from all groups are now a minority in institutions of higher education, African American males are proportionally the least represented (Becker & Becker, 2003; Bedsworth et al., 2006). This social and economic slide by Black men has continued at a time when the American economy has been severely tumultuous. The effects of this problem will have a significant impact on the national economy. Black men are disproportionately represented in the penal system, representing over 40% of the prison population (Bedsworth et al.). Society has

responded by building more prisons instead of investing in programs to address the issue of the overrepresentation of Black males in jail. The continued decline of young Black men as active participants in society adds to the strain on Black families, as more Black young men are left without good role models. Communities are losing potential leaders, teachers, engineers, and entrepreneurs who could add to the cultural and economic welfare of young Black males.

The picture of young Black men in America is more representative of life in a third-world country than life in the world's wealthiest nation. In 2000, 65% of Black male high school dropouts in their 20s were jobless; by 2004 that share had grown to 72%, compared to 34% of White and 19% of Latino dropouts. These figures include young men who were unable to find work, not seeking work, or were incarcerated (New Jersey Special Review Assessment [NJSRA], 2007). The Federal Public Defender's Office *Sentencing Resource Manual* (2007) has shown that education makes a difference in the employment status of young men. Earning a high school diploma decreased the amount of unemployment in African American men, although too many remained unemployed. For example, when high school graduates were included in the aforementioned study, one half of Black men in their 20s were jobless in 2004. These data support the direct correlation between education level and employment status.

The situation is extreme for African American men living in inner cities. Data from the Federal Public Defender's Office (2007) showed that, in inner cities, one half of all Black men had not finished high school. Moreover, by their mid-30s, 30% of the Black men with no more than a high school education had served time in prison. This figure doubled for high-school dropouts; 60% of Black high school dropouts had served time in prison. Even more alarming is that 34% of Black dropouts in their late 20s are in prison on any given day, indicating that the African American community is losing

middle-age Black men—more than the total number of Black dropouts who are working on any given day (about 30% of all Black men).

### *Academic Underachievement*

African American academic underachievement has deep historical roots. Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) stated that the first signs of academic deficiency appear very early in the lives of African American male children, although pinpointing the exact reason for academic shortcomings in this group of students is unclear. They reported that single-parent households and a higher number of births to very young mothers were two major contributing factors. However, other factors, such as stereotyping, low academic expectations, and low self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994; Kunjufu, 1984; Steel & Aronson, 1995; Tatum, 1997; Thernstrom & Thernstrom) are also theorized to contribute to academic underachievement in this group.

According to Moore, “What separate African American male students from their Caucasian counterparts are the unmeasurable burdens of racism, discrimination, and negative stereotypes” (2001, as cited in Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 35). These oppressive barriers are interpreted as messages of intellectual incompetence, which at times have negative effects on the academic identity and achievement of African American male students. Moore asserted, “Success for African American males has less to do with academic capability and more to do with motivation, self-efficacy, commitment, and follow-through, which ultimately leads to success” (p. 38). For many young African American men, the ability to succeed in the education system depends on the ability to navigate through the barriers and constraints of society.

According to Lee (2000), the notion that it is possible to educate all children at high levels, including Black males, is a perspective that should be held by all schools. Considering that line of thought, it should be possible for schools to take action to

reverse patterns of low achievement by African American males (Edmonds, 1979). Freire (1972) maintained that human beings have the capacity to resist submission to cultural patterns, demographic trends, and environmental pressures and constraints, bringing greater clarity to the actions that can be taken by schools and community organizations, meaning that African American males can and will learn at the same level as their peers if given an opportunity.

### *Scarcity of African American Male Teachers*

In the public school sector, African American students constitute approximately 20% of the public school population, while African American male teachers constitute only 1% of the teaching force (Kunjufu, 2006). Foster and Peele (1999) showed that one factor known to contribute to the success of African American males is the presence of male teachers, particularly of the same race/ethnicity. Foster and Peele asserted that teachers from the same race/ethnicity as their students are less likely to deem inappropriate behaviors sufficiently offensive to warrant a bureaucratic disciplinary response; they are more likely to attempt to cope with the behavior and change it, if it is understandable from within their social experiential base. Men tend to be less impacted by the spontaneous active and challenging behavior frequently encountered among young men and are more likely to praise and encourage them.

To fully understand the impact of an educational environment dominated by a majority White female teaching population, it is important to identify the reasons that men become teachers. According to a study published by the Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National-Louis University (CECL, 2004), almost three quarters (71%) of the administrators stated that low wages were the primary reason for so few men working as teachers in early care and education programs. Nevertheless, administrators also agreed strongly that individual and societal biases accounted for underrepresentation of males in

the early childhood work force. The following responses obtained from the CECL suggest that gender stereotyping negatively affects professional involvement of men in the care and education of young children. Some respondents admitted to holding these personal biases; others reported biases that they had heard expressed by parents and colleagues. Here are a few examples of comments made by the CECL.

I don't think males have the nurturing qualities that females do. Men tend to be the hunters . . . . Women naturally nurture.

Many men just don't enjoy spending time with children or have the patience needed to teach young children.

Society considers working with young children to be women's work so men who choose this work are looked down upon.

Parents don't want male teachers; we will lose children from our program.

There are still strong cultural expectations that a man needs to be the primary wage earner and a woman should be the primary caregiver.

Men are concerned about perceptions of why they would want to work with young children.

Men have told me that when people hear they work with young children, they assume they are gay.

I believe that many men worry about being subjected to unfounded allegations of child abuse.

Additional reasons that surfaced for the lack of male involvement in early care and education were gender-biased practices in the workplace, the isolation that males feel on the job and the absence of focused recruitment efforts to attract males into the profession. (CECL, pp. 1-2)

While the majority of educational administrators agree that it is important for young children to have both female and male teachers, only 39% indicated that they had actively tried to recruit male teachers. Over one half of the respondents (60%) agreed that there should be special incentives such as scholarships to attract males to careers in early childhood. Of those respondents who had actively tried to recruit male teachers, the following strategies were reported as most successful:

1. Encourage male volunteers and work/study students to consider early childhood as a career
2. Ask male staff members to recruit other men
3. Attend high school and college job fairs to recruit men
4. Involve parents in the recruitment process
5. Offer incentives such as paying for early childhood coursework
6. Use photographs of males in recruitment literature and add male and female descriptors to all program brochures
7. Offer referral bonuses to staff who recruit males. (CECL, 2004, p. 2)

Teacher training colleges could bridge the cultural gap that is swallowing the futures of so many children by making significant efforts to attract, recruit, and retain minority men as teachers. Boys could thus more directly experience, through teacher role modeling, that education is not a threat to their masculinity or cultural self-image.

#### *Incarceration of African American Males*

Increasingly, dropping out of high school is a one-way ticket to prison for Black men. Recent research (Cox, Matthews, and Associates, 1993) conducted by sociologist Pettit and Western indicated that 3% of Whites and 20% of Blacks born between 1965 and 1969 had served time in prison by their early 30s. Among the Black men in the group, 30% of those without a college education and 60% of those who had dropped out of high school had gone to prison by 1999.

According to Dr. Lee Brown (1993), the former U.S. drug czar, Houston, Texas, should be concerned about problems of minority males because 86% of their population then consisted of so-called “minorities.” The economics of education and crime point to a possible solution. The cost of providing a child with an education from elementary to college is about \$136,000, whereas incarcerating an offender for 8 years in prison costs roughly \$200,000.

The Federal Public Defender's Office (2007) suggested that high incarceration rates of Black males have negative consequences in both societal and academic settings. Primarily, being convicted and serving time has a negative effect on future employment and earnings prospects. African American men are disproportionately incarcerated and disproportionately serve more time in prison, especially among the least educated within this cohort. Incarceration rates have risen over the past 30 years for Black men at all educational levels, both absolutely and relative to White men.

Research (Federal Public Defender's Office, 2007) supports the theory that the high incarceration rates of Black men damage the broad perception of non-criminal Black men via statistical discrimination. The mechanism driving such discrimination is straightforward. For example, employers are generally reluctant to hire convicted criminals, even as they realize that young Black men are much more likely than other job applicants to have been convicted. Hence, unless an employer goes to the trouble of conducting a background check, he or she may shy away from hiring young Black male applicants. Research suggests that one third to one half of the decline in Black men's employment relative to their counterparts is a result of statistical discrimination. The validity of this theory sets up a catch-22 situation: If this theory is true, then there is the threat of another vicious cycle: The more Black men are incarcerated and released on to the streets, the more reluctant employers are to hire them. Black men, as a result, have lower chances of employment, good wages, job advancement, and an opportunity for a better life.

### **Societal Barriers for African American Males**

Social perceptions influence the barriers faced by African American males. The "cultural inheritance" of African Americans today is the product of a very long history of racial oppression: centuries of slavery, followed by disfranchisement, legally

mandated segregation, and subordination in the Jim Crow South and intense racial prejudice in the North (Patterson, 1997). The consequences of society's conflicting attitudes are many. First, there is academic *racial segregation* that many African American males face at an early age. Second, *negative stereotypes* play into the African American male psyche and add to the cycle of the deficit perspective, resulting in low self-efficacy and possibly low academic performance (Bandura, 1994; Kunjufu, 1984; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

### *Racial Segregation*

Classrooms are “the most racist place on campus”? It seems to me that here, as is frequently the case, there is an unavoidable — and perhaps unanswerable — chicken and egg question: if it is in fact true that the faculty has low expectations of minority students, is that because in fact the students don't perform well, or do they not perform well because of the low expectations? (Unknown student)

According to Tatum (1997), the impact of racism begins early. Tatum stated that, even in preschool years, children are exposed to misinformation about people different from themselves. Tatum recalled a class in which she began the year with the question, “How many of you grew up in neighborhoods where most of the people were from the same racial group as your own?” Almost every hand went up, indicating a great deal of social segregation. Often, the information that one receives about people of other races is second hand, resulting from racial segregation and racial clustering. Second-hand information is usually distorted or shaped by cultural stereotypes and often incomplete, resulting in misinformation and negative perceptions.

A direct correlation between educational segregation and student performance has been clearly established. Orfield (1996), a professor of education at Harvard, insisted that attending a segregated school, which he defined as one in which minorities are the majority, has unfavorable educational and social consequences. He established that segregation was one of many primary sources for the racial gap in school achievement.



Racial clustering (segregation) occurs in housing and in the workplace—factors that affect the schools that students attend and the education that they receive. It seems natural that segregation would appear in schools. Typically, students attend schools that are closer to their place of residence, supporting the notion that specific neighborhoods, generally with families of the same socioeconomic status, are directed to certain schools. This explains why some schools have a large minority population and a small majority population. This trend is particularly common in inner cities and suburbs (Orfield).

It is imperative that the academic culture have a balanced racial mix. Academic culture that nurtures learning and the expression of new and innovative ideas should be encouraged when implementing educational school policy (Altbach, Lomotey, & Kyle, 1999; Cox, Matthews, and Associates, 1993; Diop, 2004; Fashola, 2005). With a balanced racial composition in the classroom, a racial composition that is truly reflective of today's society, students receive more than just an academic education; they receive a social education as well (University of Michigan, 1998).

### *Negative Stereotypes*

African American males are often stereotyped negatively in society. *Stereotype threat* is a dilemma that has penetrated and influenced much of American life, according to Steele and Aronson (1995). They stated that overcoming stereotype threat is the key to achieving integration in society that goes beyond statistics and “allows people to flourish in an integrated setting” (p. 2). The underlining premise of this theory is that a person is categorized into a group membership, such as age, gender, ethnicity, or religion. When the person's social identity is attached to a negative stereotype, the person will tend to underperform in a manner consistent with the stereotype. Steel and Aronson attributed underperformance to a person's anxiety that he or she will conform to the negative stereotype. The anxiety manifests itself in various ways, including distraction and

increased body temperature, all of which diminish performance level. This was demonstrated when the researchers administered the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) to White and African American students. Half of each group was told that their intelligence was being measured, while the other half was led to believe that the test was not measuring their intelligence. The White students performed almost equally in the two conditions of the experiment. African Americans, in contrast, performed far worse when they were told that their intelligence was being measured. The researchers concluded that the “stereotype threat” made the students anxious about confirming the stereotype regarding African American intelligence. The researchers noted that the difference was even greater when race was emphasized.

Sometimes the assumptions we make about others come not from what we have been told or what we have seen on television or in books, but rather from what we have not been told. The distortion of historical information about people of color leads younger and older people to make assumptions that may go unchallenged for a long time. (Tatum, 1997, p. 9)

Such distortion results in negative societal perceptions. To emphasize this idea, Tatum cited a conversation between two White students following a discussion about the cultural transmission of racism. One student said, “Yeah, I just found out that Cleopatra was actually a Black woman.” The student explained her newly learned information. The second student exclaimed in disbelief, “That can’t be true. Cleopatra was beautiful!” From this exchange, one could wonder what this young woman had learned about whom in society is considered beautiful and who is not.

Like assumptions concerning Black males and their characteristics can be used in education, when the issue of intelligence is considered. In *The Bell Curve* Herrnstein and Murray (as cited in Plucker, 2003) claimed a connection between cognitive ability and ethnicity. The researchers found that African Americans typically earned IQ scores 1 full standard deviation below those of White Americans. This finding can be misleading

when considered in isolation. For example, one must acknowledge the debate between genes versus environmental influences on the racial IQ gap. Again, the assumption that African Americans differ in cognitive abilities adds to the negative perception of African American males.

Cognitive psychologists have made extensive efforts in the search for differences in IQ between peoples of different geographic origins now living in the same country (Diamond, 1997). In particular, numerous White American psychologists have tried for decades to demonstrate that Black Americans of African origin are innately less intelligent than White Americans of European origin. However, it has been documented (Plucker, 2003) that cognitive development is shaped by social environment and educational opportunities and not solely by ethnic origin. Diamond suggested a link between environmental opportunities and future opportunities. He asserted that cognitive abilities in adults are heavily influenced by childhood social environment, making it difficult to discern influences of pre-existing genetic differences. Furthermore, tests of cognitive ability, such as the IQ test, tend to measure cultural learning and not pure intelligence. Because of the unquestioned effects of childhood environment and learned knowledge on IQ test results, psychologists' efforts to date have not succeeded in convincingly establishing the postulated genetic deficiencies of non-White peoples (Diamond).

In *Guns, Germs, and Steel* Diamond (1997) stated that the New Guinea people of Australia impressed him as being on the average more intelligent, more alert, more expressive, and more interested in things and people around them than the average European or American. New Guineans tend to perform poorly at tasks (e.g., academic tests) that Westerners have been trained to perform since childhood but to which New Guineans have not been exposed. Hence, when unschooled New Guineans from remote

villages visit towns, they seem to Westerners to be unintelligent. This same notion can be transferred to African American males in America. Most Black males have not had the luxury of growing up in an academically enriched environment where they have been told that they can be successful academically, as have most White males. This supports the notion that, as long as Black males remain in their current state and environment, they will not be academically successful according to today's societal measures of success.

In *Other People's Children* Delpit (1996) recalled a statement made by one of the young Black boys whom she interviewed. The young man stated that there were three types of teachers in his middle school: (a) Black teachers, none of whom were afraid of Black students; (b) White teachers, a few of whom were not afraid of Black students; and (c) the largest group, White teachers who were afraid of all Black students. The last group had the most difficulty in teaching and their students had the most difficulty in learning. The young man who made this statement was 12 years old. The remarks by this young man illustrate a key issue: Some people are conditioned by society to be afraid of people different from themselves. The case highlights that even teachers can be influenced by negative stereotypes that are created by society and that add to the cycle of deficit perspective and negatively affect all African American males (Delpit).

Others have noted the continued influence of negative stereotypes within the work place. May, a P16 Field Specialist for the state of Texas, made an observation while visiting a high school in Galveston. The racial composition of the school was imbalanced: about 80% African American students, with 76% Caucasian teachers. According to his observations, the teachers at this school seemed defeated. They did not participate in after-school activities to assist students with studies to raise the school's

test scores. Devaluing the campus climate, May concluded that part of the lack of involvement by the teaching community could be attributed to the fact that the teachers did not want to commit extra time to prepare students for college. He inferred that this hesitance stemmed from the fact that the effort required the teachers to interact with the students on a personal level. He concluded that the teachers were afraid of the students or just did not believe that the students were capable of going to college.

Diamond (1997) stated that the association of a group of people to specific defining characteristics is common in this society and throughout the world. He contended that, in today's Western society, people publicly repudiate racism but many, perhaps most, continue to accept, privately or subconsciously, racist explanations about the mental capacity and academic ability of certain races. In Japan and many other countries such explanations are still advanced publicly and without apology. Even among educated White Americans, Europeans, and Australians, it is assumed that there is something primitive about the Aborigines of Australia, probably chiefly because their physical appearance is different from that of the White Australians. Many of the living descendents of those Aborigines who survived the era of European colonization now find it difficult to succeed economically in White Australian society (Diamond).

### *The Influence of Affirmative Action*

Affirmative action has become one of the most controversial issues in higher education since its initiation in the 1960s, especially for admissions policies concerning students of color. Affirmative action policies challenge the racially charged issue of merit versus need by trying to close the gaps between the "haves" and the "have-nots" (Aguirre & Martinez, 2003), thus making it a sensitive subject. Affirmative action efforts address issues still unresolved concerning extensive injustices of hundreds of years earlier, specifically slavery.

Historically, American society has presented itself as a luminescent symbol of limitless equality and boundless opportunity. Providing an opportunity for African American males to obtain a college education should be one of the main objective of colleges and universities. In the courts, the first real test of affirmative action in higher education came in *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* (438 U.S. 265). This case is generally acknowledged as the template for discrimination cases in higher education. *Bakke* was important for so many reasons. First, it acknowledged the notion that racial discrimination existed in higher education. Second, although it prohibited the use of racial quotas, stating that the University of California's special admissions program violated the Equal Protection Clause, the *Bakke* ruling allowed race-based admissions (Aguirre & Martinez, 2003).

The *Bakke* case can be interpreted from two distinctly different perspectives. From one perspective, it enabled opponents of diversity and affirmative action to challenge the use of race, ethnicity, gender, financial aid, and staff and faculty employment, which was taboo during those racially heated times. From another perspective, the case served as a sign of progress for non-Whites. In the end, the Supreme Court concluded that the law school in the *Bakke* case sought to bring in a "diversity of views," meaning that they tried to evaluate the case from myriad perspectives. In making this statement, the court completely ignored two profound theories of society: (a) Race is a socially constructed phenomenon that involves oppression and hierarchy, and (b) knowledge is a function, among other things, of a person's position in society (Aguirre & Martinez, 2003). By allowing even more constraints to exist in the educational pipeline, which in this case translates into limited access into programs such as the one discussed in the *Bakke* case, a message of

detachment was sent, indicating that diversity and assimilation are the problems of the nondominant race.

It took decades for the courts to discontinue supporting the ideals, principles, and paradigms of White society and introduce the notion of possible discrimination against non-Whites. Although this revelation occurred, it is still difficult for non-Whites to demonstrate that they have been victims of racial discrimination.

In 1996 the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals challenged the *Bakke* ruling by contesting two scholarship programs at The University of Texas at Austin. The Texas Achievement Award (TAA) and the Texas Academic Honors Award (TAHA) were tools used in the admissions process to recruit and retain underrepresented minority students. These scholarship programs were a small part of the affirmative action plan to increase the ethnic diversity of the campus (Hanson & Burt, 2006). The court rendered the *Hopwood* decision (*Hopwood v. Texas*, 21 F.3d 603, 5th Circuit), which discounted the Supreme Court decision in *Bakke*, and argued that race should be disregarded in the admissions process of institutions of higher education. Following the court's ruling, the Texas Attorney General's Office issued a statement prohibiting public colleges and universities from using a student's racial or ethnic background as a consideration in any recruitment, admission, or retention activities. Although these decisions were not national in scope, they affected colleges and universities within the jurisdiction of the Fifth Circuit: Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Institutions of higher education in that jurisdiction were barred from using race as a consideration in recruitment and retention from 1996 until 2003, when the Supreme Court heard another case that challenged the use of race in admissions (*Grutter v. Bollinger*).

In 2003, in the most important case addressing the issue of race in education since *Bakke*, the Supreme Court upheld the University of Michigan Law School

admission policy. The case, *Grutter v. Bollinger*, signified the court's move from "affirmative action to affirming diversity" (Sandoval & Sandoval, 2004). In the Court's decision Justice Sarah Day O'Connor (speaking for the majority) stated, "Universities hold a special place in our society and that they should be given special deference with respect to their academic decisions, but within constitutionally proscribed limits" (*Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 328).

In other words, the Court had clothed institutions of higher learning with "educational autonomy" and the responsibility to fashion a workable framework to achieve the objectives of diversity through admission programs as long as they are holistic, narrowly tailored, aimed at forming a critical mass, and stricken of anything resembling a quota. (Sandoval & Sandoval, p. 22)

Moreover, Justice O'Connor wrote that the Court

endorse[s] Justice Powell's view [in *Bakke*] that student body diversity is a compelling state interest that can justify the use of race in university admissions because attaining a diverse student body is at the heart of the Law School's proper institutional mission. (*Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 328)

Through its ruling the Court signified the importance of diversity in higher education:

"Effective participation by members of all racial and ethnic groups in the civic life of our Nation is essential if the dream of one Nation, indivisible, is to be realized" (*Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 328).

Diversity in higher education is a controversial issue, and controversial issues are often easy to attack. Some still argue that affirmative action programs that are designed to improve the position of women and certain minorities are, in principle, outdated. Many of these advocates are shifting the theory of affirmative action from a race- and gender-based policy to a need-based policy. Here, economic class and need, rather than race and gender, would constitute the target category of affirmative action, and special consideration would be given to people because they are poor rather than because they are Black, Latino, or women. This shift in policy has obvious political and ethical appeal; however, it is not an acceptable solution. Morally acceptable remedies to certain



forms of unjustified inequalities will not be adequately addressed if the problems are restructured in economic terms alone or by programs that seek only diversity (Feinberg, 1998).

Members of American society are all stakeholders in today's educational arena. Therefore, all students deserve access to a quality education because the results benefit everyone. By providing an equal opportunity to the undereducated of the country, all benefit. The student who receives an education today may make the decision not to commit a robbery tomorrow. Moreover, society tends to forget the original premise of affirmative action. Affirmative action was not created to put more minorities and or women in higher work positions, or to admit them into educational programs. Affirmative action was implemented to assist "qualified" minorities and women competing for higher work positions and better educational programs (Holzer & Neumark, 1996). This is something that adversaries and supporters of affirmative action often forget. Affirmative action was meant to increase diversity throughout society.

The Supreme Court's two landmark affirmative action rulings upholding the general practice of race-conscious admissions has sent a clear and undeniable message: Race-based admission is still an unclear and controversial issue in higher education. Such a practice, although it may be problematic for colleges, has been praised as "a good thing" (Affirmative Action, 2003, p. 15). The rulings have forced colleges that wish to use race as a factor in admissions to abandon formula-driven approaches to sorting through stacks of applications. As a result, they must create an admissions process in which every applicant is given a comprehensive review. That shift will naturally lead colleges to think about applicants in more complex, subtle, nuanced ways. The issue of race-based admissions must be reviewed and resolved.

Two concerning issues of affirmative action in higher education are (a) that the advancement of people according to their academic merit, without taking into account the background and/or history of lower socioeconomically disadvantaged people, who according to recent studies, will not do well academically, is not a fair admission criterion; and (b) whether institutions of higher education can afford to make the changes that are needed in response to increased enrollment of minority students. Although education as a whole has not changed, many environmental factors have changed, such as race-based admissions, the controversial issue of defining diversity, and the financial crisis that faces all areas of higher education, which will inevitably have an impact on the rest of society.

Although this author agrees that affirmative action is needed in higher education to maintain equality in a just society, the issue of funding must be addressed. Additional funding will be needed to create diversity scholarships, to initiate campus programs in response to increased enrollment of minority students, to hire and train employees who are sensitive to diversity issues and needs, and to market these programs. Can colleges afford to commit necessary funds to these admission programs? Laird (as cited in *Affirmative Action*, 2003) maintained that colleges and universities have adequate resources for such programs and that, in spite of difficult budgeting times, many colleges and universities have increased their funding for admissions offices.

### *Impact of Affirmative Action on Students*

For years, educators in the U.S. higher education system have argued that affirmative action policies are justified because they ensure the creation of the racially and ethnically diverse student bodies essential to providing the best possible educational environment for students, White and minority alike (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). The U.S. government attempts to address the issue of diversity in the higher

education system by developing various policies intended to make higher education systems increasingly diverse (Teixeira & Amaral, 2001).

Racial and ethnic diversity in a student body and university fosters opportunities for diverse students to interact and learn from each other, whether in the classroom or outside the classroom, offering college students who have been raised in segregated schools and communities the features that will foster active thinking and personal development (Gurin et al., 2002). These features include novelty and unfamiliarity that occur in the transition to college and opportunities to identify discrepancies among students with distinct precollege social experiences. Students with exposure to a diverse student body are said to be more motivated and better able to participate in an increasingly heterogeneous and complex society.

The process of selecting students could become more expensive, more time consuming, and more complicated for colleges and universities. On July 20, 1995, the University of California Board of Regents mandated that preferential treatment end and that individual opportunity be based on merit. This action prohibited the university from using race, religion, gender, ethnicity, or national origin as a criterion for admission. A year after this resolution was issued, the voters of California endorsed a referendum extending the ban to other institutions. Thus, California spearheaded a nationwide reaction against affirmative action—a reaction that is built on distortions and misunderstandings of the idea of affirmative action (Feinberg, 1998).

Many colleges and universities have also begun the Herculean task of diversifying their schools, setting in place policies and award incentives to attract students from various racial groups, for example, the APS Scholarship for Minority Undergraduate Physics Majors, which is available for any African American, Hispanic American, or Native American U.S. citizen. Currently, Texas A&M University-College

Station has in place the Century Scholars Program designed to increase the number of enrolled students from underrepresented high schools. Recruiters from the university target 41 high schools in two of the state's urban areas (the Houston and Dallas/Ft. Worth areas), providing monetary awards of up to \$20,000. Students selected for this program also act as ambassadors to their high schools to promote Texas A&M University. Programs such as these are greatly needed and should be recognized for their efforts not only to recruit students from underrepresented populations but also to retain them. Although programs like the Texas A&M University Century Scholars Program are in existence and should be recognized and applauded, there is still a lack of programs that specifically target Black males and address their shallow presence in higher education.

Researchers (Affirmative Action, 2003; Altbach et al., 1999; Gurin et al., 2002) have reported a broad range of racial and ethnic diversity programs that promote educational and democratic outcomes. Learning outcomes include active thinking skills, intellectual engagement, motivation, and a variety of academic skills. Democracy outcomes include perspective taking, citizenship, engagement, racial and cultural understanding, and judgment of the compatibility of differing groups in a democracy.

#### *The Spellings Report and Accessibility for Black Males*

The Commission on the Future of Higher Education, formed by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, is composed of public officials, researchers, and leaders from the academic and business communities. The Commission determined that college access was limited by inadequate academic preparation, that the current financial aid system was not working, and that information about cost and performance of colleges and universities was lacking (Moore, 2006). Secretary Spellings announced plans to

improve the U.S. higher education system based on recommendations presented in the Commission's final report. Included in her plan were the following points.

1. *Academic preparation.* Continue to strengthen K-12 education, align high school standards with college expectations, increase access to college preparatory and Advanced Placement classes, and work with Congress to expand the successful principles of the No Child Left Behind Act to high schools, holding these schools accountable for results.

2. *Financial aid.* Increase need-based aid, simplify the financial aid process, and hold costs in line.

3. *Accountability and information systems.* Develop a privacy-protected, student-level data system that would provide access to information on college affordability and financial aid. Colleges, universities, and states would collect and publicly report data on student learning outcomes. Such a system could increase transparency and accountability for quality and learning outcomes and improve higher education's performance and the ability to measure that performance (Inside Higher Education, 2008).

The Spellings Report has the potential to have a significant impact on colleges and universities, specifically on their students and more specifically African American males. The first point (academic preparation) has the largest potential for impact because, according to Weatherspoon (2005), African American males are less likely than their White counterparts to be identified as "gifted" and less likely to take honors courses in mathematics and science. Moreover, African American males are generally "tracked" into remedial courses and are absent from honor clubs and academically related student organizations. They are systematically isolated and segregated in special education classes; representing 25% to 40% of students in special education programs,

they graduate at disproportionate numbers with special education diplomas (Bonner, 2001; Cuyjet, 2006; Fashola, 2005; Ford & Moore, 2004).

The most common objection to affirmative action in higher education is that it is inconsistent with an emphasis on individual academic merit and promotes the idea that students have rights as members of groups rather than as individuals. Many universities and colleges have, for years, used unfair qualifiers in the case of admissions, such as in the case of Texas A&M University's Legacy program, a preferential admission policy for children of alumni. In 2003 the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the *Hopwood* decision, ruling that race could be used as one of many factors in admissions and scholarships. As a result, many schools in the state of Texas, including The University of Texas at Austin, and Texas Tech, changed their admission policies. Texas A&M, which has more than 40,000 students, did not change its policies. The university decided against using race as a factor in admissions, yet it continued to maintain the only legacy program among Texas public universities. Sewing (2004) reported that, after a number of complaints from the general public and state Representative Dawnna Dukes, the University decided to counter the negative publicity by diversifying its student body and increasing the recruitment of minority students who are accepted into the university but have not decided whether to attend by offering more financial assistance and scholarships for minorities. The university has generated \$8 million in scholarship money from alumni donations and other sources, much of which is targeted for low-income students.

Now that the issue of race is involved, admissions criteria have become an important issue. The face of the student in higher education is rapidly changing, and it is time for administrations to react and change as well (Altbach et al., 1999; Ami, 1999). Institutions should have a clearly written formal admissions policy and should use a variety of sound criteria, such as race, ethnicity, gender, test scores, and essay writing in

the selection process. In review of these qualifiers, administrators should not use one singular qualifier as a reason to admit or deny an applicant (Affirmative Action, 2003).

Despite their growth in numbers, African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans remain underrepresented in higher education (Zusman, 1999). As scholars debate issues of access to higher education, they do so without recognizing that equal access to educational opportunity, as a matter of national policy, is a new phenomenon for persons of color. In other words, some discussions are often historical in that little attention is paid to the decades of social, economic, and political discrimination and exclusion from access and opportunity. Not until 1954, with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, did the Supreme Court make equal access the law of the land. It was even more recently, after the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, that de facto rights of admission were granted to persons of color at many institutions of higher education, especially predominantly White institutions.

In the future, as universities and colleges attempt to address these issues, they will need to develop ways to respond effectively to underrepresented students, particularly African American males (e.g., campus programs addressing a student's cultural needs and providing financial advice and assistance). Scheurich and Young (1997) alluded to the notion that the accepted paradigms and policies (e.g., financial aid) and the argument for need versus merit that regulate today's society directly affect the underrepresented and their ability to be successful, especially in higher education.

It has been said that racial superiority is a mere "pigment of the imagination." Despite evidence offered by social scientists that African American males are adversely affected by segregated schools (Aguirre & Martinez, 2003) and that school desegregation has served to advantage Whites rather than to solve social inequity, the courts refuse to acknowledge that racism exists in today's institutions of higher

education. This failure ensures that Whites remain dominant in the quality of education received.

## **Perceptions of African American Men**

### **From a Research Perspective**

#### *Epistemological Racism*

Undoubtedly, diversity is one of the most controversial issues in academia. Scheurich and Young (1997) stated that allegations from respected scholars of color Ladson-Billings and Shujaa have made suggestions that the epistemologies of educational research may be racially biased. These scholars have asserted that the methodology by which research is handled, the knowing, and the implicitly proposed are racially biased as well.

Ladson-Billings (2000) posited that epistemology is closely linked to worldviews that translate into reality. Likewise, Shujaa (1997) stated that worldviews and systems of knowledge are symbiotic, inferring that how one views the world is largely influenced by what knowledge one possesses and that what knowledge one is capable of possessing is largely influenced by one's worldviews. Thus indicating the conditions under which people live and learn shape both their knowledge and worldviews.

The field of research has always had methodological conflicts and theory-based disagreements, creating many interesting discussions. The notion or suggestion that there is a negative perception concerning race-based issues in research has ignited basically no response in a field that lives to analyze and support theories as correct or discredit other scholars' theories. It can only be assumed that this is based on one of several possibilities: (a) The issue of race is a sensitive issue and most people do not want to address or acknowledge it; (b) the argument has been considered weak or irrelevant, or (c) the argument simply is not understood (Scheurich & Young, 1997).



One other suggestion might be that, like so many other important issues that do not concern the dominant race, it might have been ignored and deemed unimportant. Researchers may have had difficulty in understanding the theory of epistemological racism and what constitutes an appropriate method of measuring it. One can assume that any particular field of research has grown based on the field's expansion of its knowledge base. When only one particular group of researchers studies a particular field (e.g., White males), what methods or tools can be used to validate their theories or their knowledge base? Wynter (1992) argued that such systems of knowledge, as acts of communication that influence the behaviors of those being studied, are always generated from the paradigm of value and authority on whose basis the order is instituted. "Paradigms are representations of world views that define 'the nature of the world, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts'" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). Thomas Kuhn (1962), in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, used the term *paradigm* to refer to a disciplinary matrix—the commitments, beliefs, values, methods, outlooks, and so forth shared across a discipline.

The question then arises: How does one define a knowledge base? Is a knowledge base something found in books and other printed material (Merriam & Brockett, 1996)? Is it something that people know to be right or true but have not written down (known or assumed knowledge)? Does research produce knowledge that is tainted or biased by the researcher's personal feelings or experiences? Merriam and Brockett submitted that the concept of a knowledge base includes all of the above.

The discussion of a paradigm is crucial at its earliest inception. When researchers get interested and involved, the growth of research contributes to the development of a knowledge base, thereby expanding it. With that in mind, the current scope of epistemologies "arises out of the social history and culture of the dominant race . . .

logically reflecting and reinforcing that social history and that racial group, while excluding the epistemologies of other races and cultures” (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 4).

The critical result of epistemological racism creates adverse consequences for racial and cultural groups that have different epistemologies, idealisms, and ontologies. As a consequence, racial and cultural groups that are not among the dominant culture are confronted with a number of research problems. For example, the research and epistemologies that stem from cultural histories and experiences outside the domain of the dominant culture strive for validation within the mainstream research community. The most common research paradigms reflect a cultural influence that is historically derived from a predominantly Anglo standard. Scholars of ethnic and cultural backgrounds outside the dominant culture “must learn and become accomplished in epistemologies that arise out of a social history that has been profoundly hostile to their race and that ignores or excludes alternative race-based epistemologies” (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 4).

Epistemological racism is linked to the development of African American thoughts in the post civil rights era. Legal scholars such as Bell, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw have challenged the philosophical traditional position of the liberal civil rights stance of color blind approach to social justice (Tate, 1996).

The historical origins of critical race theory (CRT) provide a contextual understanding of contemporary legal debates concerning the effectiveness of past civil rights strategies in the current political climate. According to Delgado (as cited in Tate, 1996), both Bell and Freeman, who were but two of the original six (Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw were the other three) legal schools who challenged the traditional

philosophical position of the liberal civil rights stance of colorblind approach to social justice, were deeply concerned with the slow pace of racial reform in the United States.

The process of developing a worldview that differs from the dominant worldview requires active intellectual work and willingness on the part of the knower. The manner in which the structure and production of knowledge are designed, society tends to create individuals who internalize the dominant worldview. The hegemony of the dominant paradigm makes it more than just one way to view the world; it perpetuates the notion that this paradigm is the only way to view the world (Ladson-Billings, 2000). The achievement (racial) gap is the most important civil rights issue of our time because

an alarmingly high percentage of all American students, NAEP results show, are leaving high school today with academic skills that are “Below Basic” [and] ongoing racial inequality is not only morally unacceptable; it corrupts the fabric of American society and endangers our future. (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 36)

This can be interpreted as academically and socially devastating for African American males. African American males are already dropping out of high school (a little under 50%) and not entering institutions of higher education (about 30%) in Texas at alarmingly high rates (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2008).

Carter G. Woodson highlighted the social and academic inequities by utilizing race as a central construct. Woodson’s work *The Mis-education of the Negro* identified education’s role in structuring inequality and demotivating African American students.

The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. (as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 3)

Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that, while some may point out that all poor children do badly in school despite their race, the cause of their poverty is the condition of their schools and the institutional and structural racism that is contained within. She

stated that this is supported by Wellman's definition of "culturally sanctioned beliefs which regardless of the intentions involved, defend the advantages of Whites have because of the subordinated positions of racial minorities" (p. 23).

### *Possible Factors That Generate Academic Success*

Research (W.R. Allen, 1992; X.M. Allen, 2000; Astin, 1984; Becker & Becker, 2003; Brewer, 1990; Coleman et al., 1966; Cross, 1991; Faison, 1995; Kunjufu, 1984; Maxwell, 2004) shows a direct correlation between educational performance by African American males and the hardships that they endure within a larger society. Scholars and researchers (Edelman, Holzer, & Offner, 2006; Erickson, 1980) commonly understand that environmental and cultural factors have a profound influence on human behaviors, including academic performance (W.R. Allen; X.M. Allen; Astin, 1984; Brewer; Brookover & Erickson, 1969; Cross; Faison; Kunjufu, 1984; Morrow & Torres, 1995). The conundrum seems to be how environmental and cultural factors influence the way in which Black males come to perceive their role in the school context and how those perceptions influence their behavior and performance in school.

There is evidence that ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds of students have some bearing on how the students are perceived and treated by the adults who work with them in schools (Brookover & Erickson, 1969; Morrow & Torres, 1995). Upon the admittance of African American males to predominantly White institutions, it is common occurrence that little to no thought is given to their acclimation to the climate of the institution (Saddlemire, 1996; Taylor, 1989). African American males are often admitted to institutions that have not established diversity plans or programs to assist in their transition. The unchanging campus climate of most predominantly White institutions has been interpreted by some as White institutions as appearing to be perceived as superior and requiring that students attempting to maneuver through them

should have to assimilate to the institution's culture rather than the institution having to change their campus climate to be more accommodating to the needs of a diversifying student body (Taylor).

Poor campus climate, attitudes of indifference, ignorance, and other issues emerge as challenges that African Americans deal with at predominantly White institutions. However, predominantly White institutions have been touted and assumed to be the best places for diversity and Black student development (W.R. Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Jones, 2001; Saddlemire, 1996; Wilds & Wilson, 1998). Several programs specifically targeting Black males seem to show success

### *Societal Dissonance*

Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance deals with discrepancy between cognitions. Festinger (1957) defined these cognitions as "any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behavior" (p. 62). The related concept of *societal dissonance* is based on the foundations of cognitive dissonance theory. Thus, societal cognitions are based on the beliefs and perceptions held by people (society) instead of the beliefs held by the individual concerning displayed behavior. According to cognitive dissonance theory, people have a tendency to seek consistency among their cognitions (i.e., beliefs, opinions); the same holds true for societal dissonance. When society perceives an inconsistency between attitudes or behaviors (dissonance), something must change to eliminate that dissonance. In the case of a discrepancy between attitudes and behavior, society most likely changes its attitude to accommodate the behavior.

Festinger (1957) identified two factors that affect the strength of dissonance: the number of dissonant beliefs and the importance attached to each belief. These factors apply to cognitive and societal dissonance alike. Festinger suggested three ways to

eliminate dissonance: (a) reduce the importance of the dissonant beliefs, (b) add consonant beliefs that outweigh the dissonant beliefs, and (c) change the dissonant beliefs so that they are no longer inconsistent.

Based on Festinger's theory (1957), dissonance occurs most often in situations in which society must choose between two incompatible beliefs or actions. In the case of African American males, societal dissonance influences the way in which they are perceived. As with other subgroups, African American males can be praised or vilified; as stated throughout the paper, they are often viewed from a deficit perspective. Societal dissonance is the inability to reconcile conflicting beliefs about a group with actions carried out by individuals from that group. Dissonance occurs when society cannot differentiate between stereotypical representations of Black males (which are generally negative) and the characteristics of individual Black males encountered in the real world.

### *Self-Efficacy*

According to Bandura (1995), *self-efficacy* can be defined as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 2). These beliefs help to determine how people think, feel, react, and behave. Bandura asserted that self-efficacy can be developed by four primary forces of influence: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and emotional/physical reactions.

Mastery experiences are the most effective way of creating a strong sense of efficacy in students (Bandura, 1995). Experiencing success adds to one's sense of value and confidence in one's abilities; in contrast, experiencing a series of failures undermines efficacy. Therefore, a self-efficacy can be related to fear of failure. This fear can be responsible for inhibiting growth and development in students of all races, grades, or ability levels in academic settings. Fear of failure develops early in childhood and

leads to anxiety during performance evaluation, a lack of effort and persistence, and overall poorer performance in achievement settings (Bandura, 1978; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Howard and Hammond (1985) asserted that everyone encounters failure but unexpected failure affects students differently from expected failure.

Positive social models are vital to establishing positive self-efficacy. Vicarious experiences provided by social models serve to create and strengthen self-beliefs of efficacy. As suggested by Bandura (1994), "Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises observers' beliefs that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities to succeed" (p. 71). The reverse holds true as well. Observing others' failures, in lieu of great effort, lowers one's perceived efficacy. Moreover, the impact of the social model on efficacy is influenced by perceived similarity to the model. This point is especially important in mentor-mentee relationships: "The greater the assumed similarity, the more persuasive are the models' successes and failures" (p. 81).

Social persuasion, a deliberate attempt on the part of one party to influence the attitudes or behavior of another party so as to achieve some predetermined end on a societal level, serves as another way to strengthen beliefs of self-efficacy. "People who are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master given activities are likely to mobilize greater effort and sustain it than if they harbor self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies when problems arise" (Bandura, 1994, p. 74). In contrast, social persuasion can harness negative beliefs concerning efficacy. People who perceive that they lack competence in certain areas tend to avoid those areas as a means of avoiding failure.

Emotions and reactions serve as the final influence on efficacy. According to Bandura (1988), people rely on their somatic and emotional states when examining their capabilities. Stress reactions, tension, and mood tend to affect one's judgment of self-

efficacy. Therefore, “reducing people’s stress reactions and altering their negative emotional proclivities and misinterpretations of their physical state” (p. 37) can modify self-efficacy.

Bandura (1997) observed that people live with psychic environments that are primarily of their own making. Often, people can gauge their confidence by the emotional state that they experience as they contemplate an action. Moreover, when people experience aversive thoughts and fears about their capabilities, those negative affective reactions can lower perceptions of capability and trigger the stress and agitation that ensure the inadequate performance that they fear. For example, when African American males go into a test-taking situation with expectations of not doing well, anxiety often occurs and can affect their performance. This is not to say that the typical anxiety experienced before an important endeavor is a sure sign of low self-efficacy; however, strong emotional reactions to a task can provide cues about the anticipated success or failure of the outcome.

Self-efficacy beliefs operate in concert with other sociocognitive factors, such as outcome expectations or goals, in the regulation of human behavior. Bandura (1984) argued that people’s beliefs of personal competence “touch, at least to some extent, most everything they do” (p. 251). Likewise, self-efficacy beliefs mediate to a great extent the effects of other determinants of behavior. Therefore, when these determinants are controlled, self-efficacy judgments should prove to be excellent predictors of choice and direction of behavior.

Cokley (1998) acknowledged that racial and cultural identity models are important components of the psychosocial development of African American college students. X.M. Allen (2000) noted that education is considered to be a very important value within the African American community. For many African Americans, education



has been the hope to obtain equality of opportunity and achieve a better standard of living. Yet, for many African American males, pursuing higher education has become increasingly problematic.

Self-efficacy beliefs may correspond to a decision to pursue certain life goals, including higher education. “A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways. People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided” (Bandura, 1994, p. 202). Developing a positive self-image is especially important for African American males. According to Kunjufu (1984), developing positive self-images and self-discipline is a prerequisite for the effective education of African American males.

Certain factors can have particularly negative effects on the development of positive self-efficacy. According to Kunjufu (1984), the following factors have a negative influence on the development of young African American males: (a) chronic unemployment and underemployment, (b) the changing concept of childhood, (c) elitism, (e) low expectations, (e) lack of commitment to educate all children, and (f) misuse of achievement tests to label and place students. Nevertheless, institutions can be instrumental in assisting with the development of self-esteem in African American children. Kunjufu identified the following institutions as influential in the process: (a) the home, (b) the peer group, (c) television, (d) the school, and (e) the church. He asserted that these institutions should strive to emphasize positive African images to support self-esteem development in African American children.

Howard-Hamilton (1997) described four Africentric models that could be used to enhance African American males’ development on college campuses. These models provide possible strategies for increasing self-efficacy and academic performance. The

models are (a) Cross's (1991) Nigrescence model, (b) Robinson and Howard-Hamilton's (2000) Africentric resistance model, (c) Erikson's (1980) identity development model, and (d) Bandura's (1977) social learning model.

### *The Cross Theory of Nigrescence*

The Cross theory of Nigrescence is the theory of becoming Black (Cross, 1991). According to Cross, this theory consists of five stages. *Pre-encounter*, the first stage, occurs prior to an African American sensing a need to change his or her identity. Racial identity at this point is based on factors other than race, such as church and family. *Encounter*, the second stage, occurs when the African American experiences an event, usually racial in nature, that makes him or her begin to rethink his or her current identity. *Immersion-emersion*, the third stage, consists of two parts: a commitment to a personal change and a demolition of an old way of thinking. Immersion encompasses the person becoming deeply engrained in any activity or organization associated with being "Black." This stage may be evidenced by changing one's name or attire to that of Africentricity or becoming involved in organizations of African Americans, regardless of their purposes. The decisions to select certain organizations and to engage in certain activities are classified as being irrational and often erratic. Emersion occurs as radical behavior begins to change. The person begins to realize the irrationality of his or her behavior and begins to focus on the nature and purpose of selected activities. In the fourth stage, *internalization*, the person begins to internalize his or her newly developed activity and is able to appreciate the identity and cultural views of others while feeling fine about his or her own identity and views. *Commitment*, the final stage, is described as the point at which the person becomes committed to others to help them develop their own identity. The final stage allows an opportunity "to translate their personal sense of

Blackness into a plan of action or general sense of commitment” (as cited in Howard-Hamilton, 1997, p. 42).

### *Africentric Resistance Model*

The Africentric resistance paradigm is based on two concepts (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). This model fuses the Nguzo Saba value system, developed by Maulana Karenga, which “enables individuals to establish direction and meaning in their life” (p. 63) with the resistance modality model developed by Robinson and Ward. The resistance modality model is based on the philosophy that “there are healthy forms of psychological and personal resistance to negative and deleterious caricatures of one’s race or culture that can promote personal growth and modify one’s perception of the self and one’s sense of community” (p. 64). This model is meant to promote personal growth through a strong sense of identity, resulting in a healthy resistance to negative messages that attempt to “demean, destroy, or detract from that culture” (p. 64).

By combining theories from the aforementioned models, the Africentric resistance model represents a “self-affirmation, reawakening, and rebirth of personal beliefs and behaviors. Africentricity represent a strong connection to one’s spirituality and kinship via African culture” (Howard-Hamilton, 1997, p. 22). It culminates in a shared belief system whereby the self and others are seen as interconnected and results in a spirit of collective responsibility. According to Howard-Hamilton, the model “interweaves elements of the theoretical Nguzo Saba value systems with certain aspects of resistance that can initiate and promote psychological health and satisfying interpersonal relationships for African American men within and between cultures” (p. 23) The Africentric paradigm could serve as the framework for programs focused on the successful matriculation of African American men in institutions of higher education.

### *Erikson's Identity Development Model*

Identity development begins early in life and it is uncertain when, if ever, it ends. It is generally agreed that developing an identity is a life-long process, that a basic identity is solidified during adolescence and young adulthood but, as life progresses, it is continually refined. A positive resolution of the identity and repudiation versus identity diffusion crisis was classified by Erikson (1968) as “a sense of psychosocial well-being. Its most obvious concomitants are a feeling of being at home in one’s body, a sense of ‘knowing where one is going,’ and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count” (p. 165). Erikson’s stage model has been used as a point of orientation for many other developmental theorists, such as Chickering (1969) in the development of his model of college student development and Phinney’s (1989) model of cultural identity development incorporating appreciation for Erikson’s original formulation of the construct.

### *Bandura's Social Learning Model*

Social learning theory is the behavior theory most relevant to criminology. Albert Bandura held that aggression is learned through a process called *behavior modeling*. He maintained that people do not actually inherit violent tendencies but model them after three principles (Bandura, 1976). He argued that people, especially children, learn aggressive responses from observing others, either personally or through the media and environment. He stated that many believe that aggression can produce reinforcements that can formulate into reduction of tension, gaining financial rewards, gaining the praise of others, or building self-esteem (Siegel, 1992). In Bandura’s Bobo doll experiment children imitated the aggression of adults in order to gain a reward. Bandura was interested in child development because he maintained that, if aggression was diagnosed early, children could refrain from becoming adult criminals. Bandura (1976) argued that

“aggression in children is influenced by the reinforcement of family members, the media, and the environment” (p. 206). Bandura stated that modeling influences do more than provide a social standard against which to judge one’s own capabilities. People seek proficient models who possess the competencies to which they aspire. Through their behavior and expressed ways of thinking, competent models transmit knowledge and teach effective skills and strategies for managing environmental demands. Acquisition of better means raises perceived self-efficacy.

### *Where Have Our Black Heroes Gone?*

According to Loewen (1995), American history textbooks promote the belief that most important developments are traceable to Europeans. For example, most American history textbooks state that Hernando De Soto discovered the Mississippi River (of course, it had been discovered and named the Mississippi by ancestors of the original American Indians). De Soto’s discovery had no larger significance and led to no trade or White settlement. Loewen stated, “His was merely the first White face to gaze on the Mississippi; therefore, he received credit.” The Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama is often credited with being the first to sail around Africa, in 1497 to 1499. There is evidence that Afro-Phoenicians actually preceded Da Gama on this route by more than 2,000 years. (White historians insist that a case for the Afro-Phoenicians has not been proven and that history should not be distorted merely to improve Black children’s self-image.) In reading history recorded in this manner, Black students learn that Black feats are not considered as important as White ones (Loewen). This ideology does nothing for the psyche of young Black males looking for role models that would improve their self-image.

## Mentoring

The roles of mentors are difficult to define. Mentoring can take many forms and involve multiple activities. According to some practitioners, *mentors* can be defined as “teachers of relationships, rights, and responsibilities” (AAMIR, 2006, p. 1). In addition, mentoring is a “proactive strategy that exposes students to positive role models who can help with specific life skills, goal setting, and opportunities” (p. 1). Mentors are important in various stages of development in the lives of students, particularly African American males. Given the problems facing the African American community, “African American boys require communities of men who can ensure their safe passage and celebrate—through ritual and ceremony, fellowship and membership their ascension to manhood” (p. 2).

In general, the aim of a mentoring relationship is to develop and refine a young person’s skills, abilities, and understanding (LaVant et al., 1987). Mentoring relationships can be arranged formally or informally. Often, “formal mentoring programs are designed to increase enrollment and retention of minority and other students, as well as increase student satisfaction with the academic experience” (p. 33). Informal mentoring is spontaneous and established by two or more persons for the benefit of those involved. According to Jacobi (as cited in LaVant et al.), evidence supports the notion that informal mentoring positively influences the establishment of more formal mentoring programs. Given the successful outcomes of many informal mentoring arrangements, more extensive and formally structured models have followed. (LaVant et al.).

Thomas (1989) found that racial difference was often an obstacle for European American mentors in identifying positively with their African American mentees. By contrast, race served as a positive source of identification in same-race developmental

relationships for both African Americans and European Americans. These results suggest that understanding the role of mentoring in education for African American males requires a look into the convoluted variables that are associated with these relationships. Thomas also found that same-race relationships provided more psychosocial support than did cross-race relationships for both African Americans and European Americans. Based on Thomas's findings, one might conclude that the phenomenon is attributable to the inherent link of racial identity. Not only is the ethnic link void in cross-race relationships; it often becomes a hindrance to the progression of the relationship for some of the reasons discussed.

Mentoring relationships may have an effect on student attrition. Astin (1984) and Tinto (1993) identified several factors that contributed to student attrition, including academic and social integration. According to Tinto, academic and social integration influence students' decisions to persist in school or to drop out. Tinto found that various built-in characteristics significantly influenced rates of student persistence: family background, K-12 educational achievements, academic abilities, and other personal attributes. Moreover, integrating students who enter college socially, educationally, and economically disadvantaged into the social fabric of the institution may increase their chances of enhancing persistence and matriculation.

Student participation in mainstream campus life influences student attrition (Astin, 1984). Based on his research, Astin submitted that active involvement in campus life (through involvement with sports, fraternal organizations, and leadership opportunities) encourages student bonding with the institution. Through his research Astin found that highly involved students were more likely to spend more time on campus, interact more frequently with campus staff and students, and devote more time to studies. Some studies (e.g., Edelman et al., 2006; Hughes, 1987; Thomas, 1989;

Venegas, 2001) have shown that students who were connected to their university were more likely to graduate and matriculate. As suggested by current literature, the process of mainstreaming and connecting students to college campuses is more difficult for African American men. Thus, it is important to actively involve them in formal mentoring programs.

Although research regarding mentoring in higher education is sparse, mentoring programs for African American males at both the undergraduate and graduate level exist at several colleges and universities. These programs differ greatly in their structure and arrangements; however, all have shown promise in terms of increasing retention and promoting inclusion of African American males on campus. In “Retaining African American Men Through Mentoring Initiatives” LaVant et al. (1987) highlighted several of these programs:

**The Black Man’s Think Tank:** In 1993, Eric Abercrombie created this program at the University of Cincinnati. The Think Tank provides a forum for Black male academics to discuss issues and concerns that confront Black male students in higher education.

**The Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB):** Tyrone Bledsoe founded SAAB in 1990 on the campus of Georgia Southwestern University. It was designed as a Black male development model, and was established to provide student intervention and support to African American males enrolled in college. One of the key goals of this program is to help African American males develop an understanding of the responsibilities of being a citizen.

**The Black Male Initiative:** In 1990, Texas Southern University established this program in an effort to encourage Black youth in inner cities to enter colleges and universities, thus continuing their education. This program focuses on highlighting and interacting with successful role models to promote the value of education.

**The Meyerhoff Program:** The Meyerhoff Program was created in 1998 at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). Freeman Hrabowski III, president of UMBC, established the program in aims to increase the number of African American men who earn doctorates.

**The Bridge:** Georgia State University initiated a program called The Bridge in the mid-1980s with the express purpose of providing a jump start at the freshman level and enrichment of experience for African American students. Mentoring is



a major aspect of the program, which provides an opportunity for students, faculty, and staff to engage in one-on-one relationships.

**Project BEAM:** Project BEAM (Being Excited About Me) assists students of color in gaining admission to West Virginia University and also provides academic support and other services. BEAM is predicated on the fact that establishing a one-to-one relationship with prospective students and really getting to know them establishes trust and gains student commitment, which leads to successful retention. BEAM is a strategic program at WVU, designed to improve African American students' coping abilities at predominantly White colleges and universities.

**The Faculty Mentor Program-University of Louisville:** The University of Louisville is one of the universities that experienced a significant increase in freshman African American enrollment in the early 1980s. However, the number of Black students enrolled fell off dramatically after the first year of enrollment. (p. 1)

According to the Dellums Commission (2004), in 2004 African American males made up only 2.4% of undergraduate college enrollment in the 50 flagship colleges and universities participating in the study. It is imperative that educational institutions continue to devise strategies and implement programs that positively affect retention of students once they arrive on campus. Initiatives should also be created that target, encourage and attract African American males who might be a potential student, but who need extra support or encouragement to enroll in higher education. Mentoring programs can serve as a solution for tackling this issue.

Many researchers have documented the benefits of mentoring. According to researchers (Edelman et al., 2006; Fleming, 1984; Harris, 1996; Hughes, 1987; Thomas, 1989; Venegas, 2001; Woolbright, 1989), students who interact and become involved in a mentoring relationship found greater satisfaction in their collegiate experiences than those students who did not have these same experiences. Minority students consistently reported this type of satisfaction, especially African American men and professionals who benefited from having a mentor to guide them at critical points in their educational, professional, and personal development. According to LaVant et al. (1987), mentoring is

vital to the survival and empowering of African American men and enhances their ability to make plausible gains in higher education milieu.

### **Institutional Support**

Negotiating the complexities of college applications, financial aid, payment options, choice of major/study, and scheduling is difficult for the inexperienced student, particularly for those who are neophytes to the college admission process. Combined with housing choices, meal plans, and newly acquired roommates, it is easy to understand why so many students have difficulty in acclimating to college life and the responsibilities that go with being a college student. Thus, it is sometimes necessary to add the very real possibility that the average new student may not be emotionally or academically prepared. Adding variables such as race to the equation can exacerbate the situation many fold.

The relationship between the student and university is emblematic; neither can exist without the other. While providing students with personal and academic support for their educational and personal lives, the institution seeks to obtain stability of the student body until graduation. Thus far, predominantly White institutions of higher education have yet to effectively provide that support or find ways to retain African American males. Cryer-Sumler (1998) stated that an understanding of where undergraduate African American students at predominantly White institutions would refer other undergraduate African American students for assistance with stressful problems (and then trying to ensure that methods and other alternatives are accessible) is probably one of the most important issues faced when struggling to survive at a predominantly White institution. Diop (2004) found that Black students generally saw themselves as being treated fairly, neither being advantaged nor disadvantaged because of their race. This fairness of treatment is generally viewed as a very positive characteristic of an

institution. Black students expressed that it would be helpful to design and implement programs to sensitize administrators, faculty, staff, and students to racial issues and concerns.

While integration theorists (e.g., Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976; Zusman, 1999) have argued that a lack of supportive ties on campus jeopardizes student persistence, research among Black students attending predominantly White institutions has revealed a countervailing pattern. According to Bryant (1998), Black students who were well integrated socially were often most likely to drop out, while those who appeared somewhat disconnected tended to persist. Black students are conflicted to be socially accepted, which often means that they find themselves at odds with student academic responsibility. In terms of network structure, the Black students most likely to be at risk academically were those reporting the largest number of strong ties on campus; this was not the case among their White counterparts. So the question remains: If Black males are generally treated fairly on campus and there seems to be some sort of institutional support for those students on predominantly White campuses, , then why do those institutions have difficulty in recruiting and retaining these students?

While the civil strife of the 1950s and 1960s was due to lack of access to equal opportunities both in life and in the nation's institutions of higher learning, students of color are still severely underrepresented in predominantly White institutions, both as faculty and staff. Studies also reveal heavy pressure on Black students to be socially connected at levels that conflict with the student role. In terms of network structure, the Black students most likely to be at risk academically were those reporting the largest number of strong ties on campus (Bryant, 1998); this was not the case among their White counterparts.

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported an audit conducted at the University of Missouri at Kansas City (UMKC) that revealed “a miserable climate of race relations on the campus, particularly in the faculty ranks,” according to an article in the *Kansas City Star* (Rosenberg, 2006). The audit also showed that Latino students, like Black students, felt no sense of community on campus. As a result, many of those students, especially Black and Latino males, struggled to graduate or left UMKC for another college. The audit, commissioned by the university, revealed that the most racist place on campus was the classroom. Black and Latino students told auditors that they often felt offended by faculty who seemed to hold low expectations regarding their abilities. If it is true that faculty have low expectations of minority students, is that because the students actually do not perform well, or do the students not perform well because of faculty’s low expectations?

Minorities have experienced for decades the unequal distribution of education and question the quality, scope, and content of their higher education (Astin, 1985; Castellanos & Gloria, in press; Gordon, 1999; Harris, 1996; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Kerr, 1991). The proportion of minority students participating in college has been rising but still lags behind attendance rates of the national norm. The changing demographics present a challenge to most college campuses, particularly in creating a climate that is conducive and reflective of the type of students needed to ethnically diversify higher education institutions. More specifically, institutions are confronted with a growing minority population that has a different value system, an intensified awareness of their minority status, and a need for climate inclusiveness, and who are the first generation in their families to attend college (Astone & Nunez-Wormack, 1990; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Valverde & Castenell, 1998). These students are confronted with a challenge that

requires managing and coping with psychological distress as they negotiate the complexities of campus culture at predominantly White institutions.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **Naturalistic Inquiry**

This study utilized qualitative inquiry with the idea that persons in social interaction with their world construct meaning; building upon the traditions of this method that recognizes how individuals construct meaning through their social interactions. The world, or reality, is not the fixed, single, agreed-upon, or measurable phenomenon that has been assumed in positivist quantitative research (Merriam, 2002). A qualitative study is credible when it presents such accurate descriptions or interpretations of human experience that people who share that experience immediately recognize the descriptions (Krefting, 1991). This study was framed utilizing case study methodology to address factors that promote a climate of academic success related to the influence of African American male self-efficacy, the influence of the impact of the African American male mentor/role model, and the influence of support received by the African American male in predominantly White institutions.

As the nature of qualitative research is to understand in depth a particular situation or experience, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) explained that not all methods exhibit all traits to an equal degree. As offered by Schultz (2006), the use of multiple modes of inquiry allows the use of multiple theoretical lenses and methodologies for data collection and analysis to gain a richer understanding of the essence of the experience or phenomenon investigated. Data collection and analysis, through multiple modes of inquiry, including formal interviews, supported with an examination of the most current literature on the topic, ensures a more valid and credible study.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The present study is framed by CRT, a theory that regards how the philosophy defines the nature and form of reality (i.e., what can be known). Each philosophy, paradigm, approach, and so forth defines reality differently. In CRT the nature of reality is interpreted as something that has been shaped over time and history by a series of “social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors and then crystallized into a series of structures that are now inappropriately taken as ‘real’” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). CRT, a framework developed by legal scholars, has been employed to examine the role of race and racism in education. The present study utilizes CRT as an appropriate theoretical construct to address issues of societal dissonance, self-efficacy, African American male mentorship, and institutional support in higher education. The study reviews the theory in three goals of perceived influence and its impact on seven African American males’ academic success at The University of Texas at Austin. The first goal was to identify the instances of CRT in higher education. Second, the study identified themes of CRT as reported by the study participants. Third, the study presents recommendations on how to address CRT issues in higher education. Based on these findings and recommendations, CRT can be engaged in higher education with a concerted effort to change the campus climates of predominantly White institutions.

## **Research Design**

The research design of this study utilized the case study method. Case studies provide researchers with an understanding of complex social phenomena while preserving the holistic and meaningful characteristics of everyday events (Yin, 1994). The current study utilized qualitative inquiry methods to determine the participants’ perceptions of four variables: (a) societal dissonance, (b) self-efficacy, (c) male African

American mentors, and (d) institutional support provided by the institution to African American male students.

As part of this study, an online survey consisting of 15 students (who did not participate in the subsequent face-to-face interviews) was formed to help in determining questions and issues regarding motives, barriers, and enablers in successful transitions of Black male students at a predominantly White institution. The focus group used the variable of background information, to identify key issues that were then explored in the interviews of seven other students.

The participants in the online survey were asked to identify common or similar experiences to understand the focus of the study. For marketing inquiries, people with a common background, age, or demographic characteristic are typically brought together to respond to questions posed by a facilitator or leader. The responses to the questions help to reveal information or enlighten the researcher concerning the topics and questions presented. The fact that the members that participated in the online survey may have similar demographic characteristics helps the researcher to focus on the responses, with a high degree of confidence that the responses from these participants are generalizable to a larger population (Morgan, 1996). The online survey was designed to guide shaping and identifying themes that would assist in the development of questions to be used for the face-to-face interviews. This survey was administered to 15 students who attended The University of Texas at Austin, which is a predominantly White institution. Data from the survey were used to formulate the questions for face-to-face interviews with other students.

Case study research is useful in depicting a holistic portrayal of a participant's experience. Case studies have been used to organize a wide range of information about a case and then used to analyze the contents by seeking patterns and themes in the data



and by further analysis through cross case comparisons. Merriam (1998) defined a qualitative case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit (p. 11). When Merriam stated that a case study is descriptive, she was referring to the end product of the study, which is a “rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study” (p. 11).

Case study research is not sampling research, a fact asserted by researchers in the field, including Yin (1993), Stake (1995), and others. However, selecting cases must be done to maximize what can be learned in the time available for the study. Case studies provide researchers with an understanding of complex social phenomena while preserving the holistic and meaningful characteristics of everyday events (Yin, 1994). The current case study focused on interviewing seven academically successful African American male students currently attending a selected predominantly White institution (The University of Texas at Austin), selected based upon specific criteria. The seven students who participated in the study were selected because they met specific criteria and because of their academic standing. The criteria entailed a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher, student affiliations, participation in group activities, and participation in service programs. The participating students were encouraged to be honest and forthright and were reminded that their responses would remain anonymous. According to the descriptions of qualitative case study design provided by Merriam (1998), Yin (1994), and Stake, the current study was well within those designations. It focused on seven African American males in an effort to describe their beliefs, values, and lives. Analysis of data was guided by inductive reasoning, searching for relationships and themes. Yin (1994) stressed that a case study occurs “within its real-life context” (p. 13), which was an important emphasis in the study.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher was the primary data-gathering instrument, in accordance with the constructivist methodology that states that “the researcher, by necessity, engages in a dialectic and responsive process with the subjects under study” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 44-45). Flexibility and training in constructivist research allowed the researcher to adjust to the respondents’ varied and numerous realities, evaluate the interactions, consider respondents’ tacit values and beliefs, and guide the study as it took place. In describing the researcher as the primary data-gathering instrument and as a participant observer throughout the study, there is some obligation to provide a more extensive, contextual description of the researcher and of my experiential background, so that the reader may form a better understanding by which to interpret the comments and the conclusions of this study.

I am an African American male who was raised in a single-parent household by my mother, who served as a motivator and one of the reasons for the path that I chose to take in life. While I did not face the harsh realities of the mean streets of a big city, nor did I grow up in a drug-infested housing district, I grew up facing the harsh realities of being Black in an all-White environment and being reminded off that fact whenever an opportunity was available. My K-12 experience was one of predominantly White schools, with one Black male teacher throughout the whole process (my ninth-grade gym teacher). My family did not have access to the same economic resources as many of my peers, which resulted in my family moving around quite a bit, as well as to my early introduction into the work force. I exaggerated my age on an application so that I could begin working well before the legal working age of 16. While working at my job 20 hours a week at night and attending school during the day, I did not think that higher education was a reasonable option for me.

## **Participants and Selection**

A major task was to find African American male students willing to give time to participate in the interviews. Particularly, finding African American males who met the specific academic criteria proved to be quite arduous. The researcher used reputational selection (Schensul, 1999), a process that requires the researcher to acquire assistance from community or organizational experts to identify suitable people or units to study, in the process of identifying students who would meet the study criteria. The first step was to contact Kyle S. Clark, the advisor of the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB), an organization that provides development, intervention, and support to African American males on college campuses. The SAAB organization at The University of Texas at Austin is truly unique, boasting four strong programs—Student Global AIDS Walk, Alamo Recreation Center, Adopt-A- School (Kealing Middle School and Pearce Middle School), and Explore UT, all of which directly assist the Austin area in its efforts to educate and strengthen its African American community. The advisor allowed the researcher to present the purpose of the study to 62 students, 45 of whom met the study criteria. This presentation resulted in two interview participants agreeing to participate in the study.

The next step consisted of the researcher contacting Brenda Burt, the director of the Multicultural Information Center (MIC). Mrs. Burt currently serves as Advisor for the Big XII Council on Black Student Government, Vice President and Finance/Secretary of the John D. O’Bryant Think Tank for Black Professionals in Higher Education on Predominantly White Campuses, and Administrator for the Central Texas Elite Track Club; she is a former President of the African American Staff Advocating Progress Association. The purpose of the MIC is to assemble, process, and disseminate any and all information pertinent to the retention and matriculation of Black,

Latino, Asian American, and Native American students at The University of Texas at Austin. The Director contacted three students who agreed to participate in the study (only two actually participated in the interviews). Three participants were recruited through a personal contact. Each selected participant was interviewed using a questionnaire pertaining to the four research questions as well as information gleaned from suggestions from the online survey (Appendix A). The format of the participant profile is shown in Appendix B. An overview of the participants is presented in this section.

The remainder of this section provides a brief overview of the seven study participants. A more detailed picture of each of them is provided in the report of the interviews in Chapter IV.

*Andrew* was a sophomore major in Management Information Systems in the Business School; his GPA was 3.15. Andrew graduated in the top 2% of his class from a high school in Dallas. He was an officer in the Black Business Students Association and a representative to the University Business Council. He hopes to work for a successful information technology consulting company within the next seven years. Andrew was raised in a two-parent household and he described his relationship with both of his parents and his sister as good. Both were born and raised in Jamaica and had very strong work ethic. Andrew was aware of the need for graduate school and wanted to go back for a master's degree after a couple of years of experience working directly in the field.

*Colin* was a 21-year-old senior Support Management major with a GPA of 3.0. He had been raised in a single-parent household but stated that both parents had played an important role in his life. He was the treasurer and parliamentarian in the Student Alliance. He planned to obtain an MBA and then later attend law school.

*Damian* was a 19-year-old sophomore major in biology, currently classified as a pre-med student. He had been in the top 10% of his high school class. He described himself as extremely goal oriented, with a plan for the next 10-15 years. He had completed a medical summer program at Yale University. Damian was raised in a single parent household and stated that he had not relationship with his father. He identified his mother, grandmother, and two older cousins as the most important people in his life. After medical school, he planned to specialize in diagnostic radiology.

*Jesse* was a senior Business School major, from Missouri City, Texas, a suburb of Houston. He had been in the top 10% of his high school graduating class. Jesse was the president of the Chinese Yo-Yo club. He remarked, "I'm probably the first Black person to learn the skill of the Chinese Yo-Yo," explaining, "I like to take risks." He also served as chairman of the 40 Acres Best organization, an organization that actively seeks programs and developmental opportunities for families, youth, organization, and other community entities. Jesse was raised in a single-parent household and stated that his biggest motivator in life was his mother. His long-range goal was to become an investment banker.

*Justin* was a 22-year-old senior Electrical Engineering major with a 3.11 GPA. He had been in the top 10% of his high school graduating class. Justin noted his pride in upholding his principles of daily living and shaping his own values. He reported that, although his parents were divorced, both had raised him. He described that his relationship was a little better with his father because his mother was the "pusher" in the family. Justin was looking for an entry-level position after graduation and planned to pursue an MBA a little later in life.

*Saviour*, a sophomore, was a double major in biology and music with a GPA of 3.4. He stated that his parents were very religious and had wanted him to become a

priest. Instead, he compromised and decided to become a healer like Jesus; hence his decision to become a doctor. He had been raised in a two-parent household that he described as “very strict.” He said that his relationship with his mother was a little better than that with his father because his mother was liberal, in contrast to his father, who was more conservative.

*Wayne* was a 20-year-old junior Communications major with a GPA of 3.0. His mother died when *Wayne* was in the ninth grade. He was the first of three children in his family to go to college. He was raised in a two-parent household in which his aunt and uncle had served as his parents. He currently held offices in the Black Business Students Association and the African American Culture Committee. *Wayne* state that he would probably go to law school and then, after seven to nine years, become a junior or senior partner in a law firm in Dallas, New York, or Los Angeles.

Table 1 summarizes the relationships of the participants with their parents.

Table 1

*Relationships of Participants and Their Parents*

Participant	Single-parent household	Two-parent household	African American male influence
Andrew		x	x
Colin	x		x
Damian	x		
Jesse	x		
Justin	x		x
Saviour		x	x
Wayne		x	

## Observations

Observational research (or field research) is a social research technique that involves the direct observation of phenomena in their natural setting (Jorgensen, 1989). In *participant observation* the researcher joins the population or its organization or community setting to record behaviors, interactions, or events. Jorgensen asserted that the observer engages in the activities that he or she is studying, but the first priority is observation. Participation is a way to get close to the action and to get a feel for what things mean to the persons being studied. In the present study, listening to these impressive young men's stories allowed the researcher to share in their experiences and learn about their deeply held beliefs that informed their lives and successful matriculation at The University of Texas at Austin.

Observations and interviews were conducted at a designated area on the study campus. Each individual interview session lasted about 45-60 minutes. The researcher and student met on campus at an agreed location that was most comfortable for the student. Observations of the participants were conducted at the same time as the interview sessions, as well as before and after the meetings, to ensure that the researcher had captured the true essence of the interview. Detailed field notes were kept throughout each interview. Observations of people, places, facilities, and reactions were recorded in reflexive journals (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Nonverbal factors recognized through observations provided information beyond that acquired during the interviews concerning social transactions that occur during everyday activities on the campus of this predominantly White institution of higher education. These observations also assisted the researcher in becoming aware of the differences among the individuals interviewed. The reflexive journals included, in addition to the researcher's personal experiences while conducting the research project, a description of people on the

campus, participants, events, and places, and a general description of the institution's culture. Analysis of the observations provided fundamental data to understand the cultural contexts of the participants and their institution's campus environment (Spradley, 1980). All students were advised of the voluntary nature of their participation and confidentiality of their responses.

Lincoln & Guba (1985) state the writer should scrupulously honor promises of confidentiality and anonymity. They go on to support this by asserting that every effort should be made to alter the circumstances of a case sufficiently to protect those who have been promised confidentiality or anonymity (p. 365). Assurance of confidentiality was important to ensure that information would be freely given. This assurance was provided in the consent form signed by each respondent (Appendix C). The researcher followed two standards to assure confidentiality: (a) omission of details that could attribute quotations to specific individuals, and (b) omission of details that could identify any of the participants. Some interviewees were assigned pseudonyms, and no last names were used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Data Analysis**

The process of continuing reflection about the data, asking analytical questions, and taking notes throughout the study is a never-ending process (Creswell, 2003). In the current study this process involved using open-ended and general questions and developing an analysis from the information provided by the participants. Researchers should tailor the data analysis beyond the more generic approaches to specific types of qualitative research strategies; for example, the current study utilized *case study*. Case study involves a detailed description of the setting or the individuals (Creswell, 2003; Stake, 1995). The researcher used ATLAS.ti™, a type of qualitative data analysis software, to assist with analyzing the data and discovering patterns and themes. This



process involved transcribing interviews, optically scanning material, typing field notes, or sorting and arrangement the data into types depending on sources of information. The ATLAS.ti software is used predominantly by researchers and practitioners in the social sciences. It is not just a transcription tool; it is frequently used to analyze and evaluate transcribed materials. The software's primary purpose is to help researchers uncover and systematically analyze complex phenomena hidden in text and multimedia data.

### *Unitizing Data*

Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) stated, "Unitizing data is the crucial step in transforming interview data into information that may stand alone as independent thoughts in the absence of additional information other than broad understanding of the context" (p. 117). In the current study, first the interviews were transcribed from audio files into text files. Second, the transcripts were broken into "units" of data, or the smallest fragment of data from which meaning could be obtained and then categorized. Third, the units were numbered and coded by source of information, site, respondent, and date, and then imported into SPSS<sup>®</sup>. Categorizing data includes building the category set, identifying the relationship of categories within a set, and designing the discrete category code (Shapiro, 1972).

### *Identifying Themes*

Based on analysis of the online survey, the researcher identified relevant themes and patterns. A customized computer program was used to categorize raw data in the form of a word list into alphabetical order. Keywords and phrases from that list were selected for frequency and relevancy to each query. Selected keywords were then analyzed to discover patterns, on which conclusions were drawn. The researcher wrote research memos based on his findings and reflections throughout the dissertation process. These memos included methodological procedures followed through the study,

description of the context, observations, discussion of categories and later of themes, and finally considerations with regard to the participants. The software analysis revealed seven key themes: (a) reasons for going to college, (b) relationship with parents, (c) support system, (d) self-perception—aspirations and motivators, (e) goals, (f) high school experience and college access, and (g) leadership. These themes are discussed in Chapter IV.

### *Trustworthiness*

Unlike quantitative research, when addressing issues of validity and reliability, qualitative researchers use terms such as *trustworthiness*, *credibility*, *dependability*, and *consistency*. Credibility is an evaluation of whether the research findings represent a “credible” conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants’ original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). Merriam (1998) suggested that these findings are enhanced through member checks, triangulation of data and methods, an audit trail, and identification of researcher biases. The aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is to support the argument that the inquiry’s findings are “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, p. 290). Lincoln and Guba, as well as Krefling (1991), identified strategies that can be used by qualitative researchers to enhance credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Among others, these include varied field experiences, the use of field journals, triangulation, member checks, peer examination, reflexivity, and referential adequacy. For the current study, trustworthiness was established through the use of triangulation, thick description, and reflexive journaling. Through that trust and familiarity, the researcher obtained guarded information.

### *Credibility*

To assist in addressing credibility, three techniques were employed. First, the research design included four specific research questions rather than one or two. The intention was to generate four means of eliciting the data from each participant. While this technique may not adhere to the technical definition of “triangulation” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), it provided a richer, multilayered, and more credible data set than one or two research questions would have produced.

Second, a peer debriefer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was engaged. Dr. Blanca Alvarado holds a dual Ph.D in Sociology and Social Work from Boston University and is an active professor in the field of sociology. Dr. Alvarado was responsible for ensuring that the researcher stayed on task and remained unbiased toward the collected data. Periodically during the process of data analysis, Dr. Alvarado provided regular feedback and posed questions regarding the research questions, methodology, ethics, and trustworthiness. She made pointed observations and suggestions, acting as a “devil’s advocate” throughout the process. Her role was generally consistent with that defined by Lincoln and Guba.

Third, “member checking” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was completed with six of the seven participants (the seventh participant did not respond to emails and telephone calls requesting participation in this phase of the study). Member checks provide an arena in which responses can be clarified, amended, expanded, and ultimately confirmed by the participant. During data collection and analysis, member checks were used by asking for clarification during the interviews. Each participant reviewed his own interview, suggesting corrections or additions and commenting on interpretations. Additional member checks were conducted by the researcher after all interview data had been transcribed from tape to text files. Several respondents sent additional comments,

which were transcribed and included with the original data. Performing member checks supports the trustworthiness of the findings through testing categories, interpretations, or conclusions/constructions (Erlandson et al., 1993). The combination of interviews, observations, and documents allowed for triangulation of data and methods to corroborate the researcher's interpretation of each participant's beliefs and practices. In the process of member checking each participant reviewed a summary of the data analysis procedure and a summary of the final results of the inquiry. The participants answered several standardized interview questions and offered comments on whether they felt that the data were interpreted in a manner congruent with their experiences. In addition, all participants made comments that directly connected the findings to one or more personal experiences that they had reported in the study.

Source triangulation of data, a technique used to improve the probability that findings and interpretations will be found credible, was conducted by utilizing multiple researchers to interpret the data in order to minimize and understand any biases the researchers may have. Source triangulation was provided by a peer of the researcher who assisted in the interpretation of the data at two different periods, a) initially after the researcher gathered the data, b) after the researcher interpreted the data.

Transferability, which is often utilized to demonstrate the applicability of results in context to others, is enhanced by providing *thick rich description* (i.e., giving enough detail so the readers can decide for themselves if the results are transferable to their own contexts). This was addressed by providing a thick rich description of places, people, and facilities of the institution stated within the study; a detailed description of particular events during each trip; and rationales for using the chosen methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The complete set of data analysis documents are on file and available upon request. This access to the researcher's methodology gives other researchers the ability

to transfer the conclusions of this inquiry to other cases or to replicate, as closely as possible, the procedures of this project.

The researcher kept a reflexive journal describing in detail his experiences during this research project, including seven data collection trips to the campus. These tools were kept throughout the research project to ensure trustworthiness and to document the researcher's decisions (Erlandson et al., 1993). The journals included a schedule and record of logistics (when, where, and with whom interviews and observations were conducted); elaboration of personal values, beliefs, frustrations, and speculations that emerged as insight was gained; a thick description of places, people, and facilities in each institution; a detailed description of particular events during each trip; and rationales for using the chosen methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Describing the steps taken during data collection and analysis creates an audit trail. Each researcher's biases, past experiences, and implicit thoughts impact his or her research interpretations (Eisner, 1998); however, another researcher should be able to use the trail provided in this study as an "operating manual" to replicate the study (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 216). By periodically reviewing this audit trail throughout the study.

Transferability is the degree to which the findings of an inquiry can apply or be transferred beyond the scope of this study. Dependability is an assessment of the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation. Confirmability is a measure of how well the inquiry's findings are supported by the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this inquiry, trustworthiness was enhanced through the strategies detailed below.

### *Dependability*

To address the issues of dependability and confirmability, a competent peer was engaged to conduct an independent audit of the research methods (Lincoln & Guba,

1985; Patton, 1990). The auditor, Rebecca Duong, is an Assistant Principal in the field of secondary education with experience equivalent to that of the researcher. She is in the process of finishing her own doctoral studies in Educational Administration and is familiar with both quantitative methodology and qualitative research in general. Ms. Duong thoroughly examined the audit trail, consisting of original transcripts, data analysis documents, field journal, comments from the member checking process, and the text of the dissertation. Based on established precedent in qualitative research, she assessed both the dependability and confirmability of the project, as well as the completeness and availability of auditable documents. She also evaluated the degree and significance of researcher influence. To further enhance the dependability of the study, a methodological triangulation of data technique was employed. This was conducted by utilizing multiple data gathering procedures (e.g., observations, interviews, and questionnaires).

Table 2 summarizes the described process that was applied during the study to ensure trustworthiness of the findings, based on four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Table 3 summarizes the strategies used to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. Table 4 summarizes the method utilized in the study according to the types of data collected.

Table 2

*Strategies Used in the Study to Ensure Trustworthiness of the Findings: Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability*

Criterion	Measure	Strategy
Credibility	Member checking	Extended telephone conversations with each of the participants, face-to-face interviews, and member checking to build trust and familiarity between researcher and participant to obtain guarded information.
	Investigator Triangulation	The use of multiple investigators (i.e., multiple researchers) in collecting and interpreting the data.
	Peer debriefer	A peer experienced in research reviewed and critiqued the study and made recommendations.
	Reflexibility	Researcher examined his own perspective to assess insight, understanding, and knowledge gained in order to minimize biases.
Transferability	Sampling	Purposive sampling of African American males
	Thick description	Comprehensive description of method
Dependability	Dependability audit	Researcher's colleague served as a debriefer.
	Methodological Triangulation	Was conducted by utilizing multiple data gathering procedures (e.g., observations, interviews, and questionnaires).
	Dense Thick description	Comprehensive description of method
Confirmability	Bracketing and intuition Confirmability, Audit Trail, Triangulation, Reflexive Journal	The researcher used bracketing and intuition during data collection and analysis; an independent researcher conducted an audit trail.

Table 3

*Strategies Used in the Study to Ensure General Trustworthiness of the Findings*

Strategy	Description
Researcher as “detective”	A metaphor characterizing the qualitative researcher as he/she searches for evidence about causes and effects. The researcher develops an understanding of the data through careful consideration of potential causes and effects and systematically eliminating “rival” explanations or hypotheses until the final “case” is made “beyond a reasonable doubt.” The “detective” can utilize any of the strategies listed here.
Triangulation	“Cross-checking” information and conclusions through the use of multiple procedures of sources. When the different procedures or sources are in agreement, there is corroboration.
Participant feedback	Feedback and discussion of the researcher’s interpretations and conclusions with the participants and other members of the participant community for verification and insight
Peer review	Discussion of the researcher’s interpretations and conclusions with other people. This includes discussion with a “disinterested peer” (e.g., with another researcher not directly involved). This peer should be skeptical and play the “devil’s advocate,” challenging the researcher to provide solid evidence for interpretations and conclusions.
Reflexivity	Self-awareness and “critical self-reflection” by the researcher regarding his/her potential biases and predispositions, as these may affect the research process and conclusions.

the researcher ascertained whether interpretations of the data were derived from the closeness of the data and the researcher and his familiarities. The audit trail also allowed for both research colleagues to review the steps of the researcher and confirm credibility.



Table 4

*Characteristics of Data Collection Methods Used in the Study*

Method	Options within the method	Advantages of the method	Limitations of the method
Observation	Observer as participant: role of researcher is known	Researcher has first-hand experience with the participants	Private information may be observed that the researcher cannot report
Interview	Face-to-face: one-on-one, in-person interviews	Participants can provide historical information Allows researcher control over line of questioning	Researcher's presence may bias responses
Document review	Private documents such as journals, diaries, and letters	N/A	Materials may be incomplete
Audiovisual materials	Computer software; Audio/electronic MP3 recorder	May be an unobtrusive Provides opportunity for participants to share their reality directly	May be difficult to interpret

**Limitations of the Study**

Conclusions from this research are specific to the research setting and the individual situation and are not intended to be generalized. However, findings and conclusions may be used as a referent for future programs and the possibilities of developing a deeper understanding of the issues. The findings may also be used to assist institutions of higher education in recruitment and retention of young African American males. Furthermore, the interview protocol could be viewed as a limitation because the protocol instrument identified variables and themes that were indirectly related to the research questions.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

Multiple interviews characterize much of qualitative research because multiple interview research helps to form strong interviewer-interviewee bonds that some people define as characteristic of qualitative research (Reinharz, 1992, p. 36). In structured interviews the traditional role of the researcher as interviewer has been one of an interested but affectively detached observer who plays “a neutral role, usually directive and impersonal” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 364). LeCompte (1993) suggested that not only is authenticity achieved by attributing a sense of genuineness to the quality of the narrative but that authenticity is reflected in the relationship between the researcher and the researched. She argued that authenticity cannot be achieved when those who are researched are placed in a position that is subordinate to that of the researcher.

### **Summary**

The qualitative activities utilized for analysis in this study are not presumed to be exhaustive. The objective was to conduct and interpret individual interviews using a qualitative, inductive methodology. Analysis began with an extensive review of the literature to identify what issues impeded the retention and/or graduation rates of African American males in higher education. Individual interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed to a word processing format. A customized computer program was used to categorize raw data in the form of an alphabetical word list. Keywords and phrases from that list were selected for frequency and relevance to each query. Themes that emerged from the analysis of the unitized data were categorized and further analyzed to reveal patterns, based on which conclusions were drawn.

As the study evolved, additional conversations were necessary to obtain an in-depth understanding of how the findings directly aligned with the research questions. In

many cases, the same person may be interviewed on several occasions using an informal, conversational approach (Patton, 1987).

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

#### **Analysis of the Data**

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived influence of societal dissonance, self-efficacy, African American mentorship, and institutional support on the academic success of seven African American male undergraduate students at a predominantly White institution of higher education. This was done by examining the student's self-efficacy, support structure, and academic background. Four research questions guided this study:

1. What is the perceived influence of societal dissonance on the African American male's academic success?
2. What is the perceived influence of self-efficacy on the African American male's academic success?
3. What is the perceived influence of African American male mentorship on the African American male's academic success?
4. What is the perceived influence of institutional support on the African American male's academic success?

An electronic survey was sent to 15 African American male students in higher education at the selected predominantly White institution (The University of Texas at Austin). Data from the study were intended to inform continued development and evolution of continuous improvement strategies for addressing issues that African American males encounter on both societal and institutional levels.

#### **The Study Institution**

Due to demographic changes within their student bodies, colleges and universities have been forced to actively create and then maintain a productive, healthy

campus climate. While there is no single definition for *campus climate*, the Campus Climate Network Group (CCNG; 2002) defined campus climate and noted that it is generally presumed to represent the students, faculty, and staff feeling valued and respected, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, job class, ability/disability, or any other characteristic. It also refers to policy and practice that relate to behaviors in a workplace or learning environment that can influence whether an individual feels safe, listened to, and treated fairly and with respect. It also describes an organization's structures, policies, and practices; the diversity of its faculty, staff, and students (in the case of a higher education institution); the attitudes and values of its members and leaders; and the quality of personal interactions and communication.

The University of Texas at Austin (the University) is one of the largest public universities in the United States. Founded in 1883, the University has grown from a single building, eight teachers, two departments, and 221 students to a 350-acre main campus with 21,000 faculty and staff, 16 colleges and schools, and almost 50,000 students. With more than 3,500 master's and doctoral degrees awarded annually, the graduate school is a national leader in graduate degrees awarded and one of the largest graduate schools in the nation. More than 8,700 Bachelor's degrees are awarded annually in more than 170 fields of study and 100 majors. *The Times of London*, in a 2004 survey of colleges and universities around the world, ranked the University as the 15th-best university in the world. In the latest survey by the National Research Council, seven doctoral programs ranked in the top 10 in the nation and 22 departments ranked in the top 25. Among Texas colleges and universities, The University of Texas at Austin ranked No. 1 in 30 of the 37 fields in which it was evaluated.

Over the past decade the University has had its share of adversities and media coverage related to cases of racial insensitivity and minority access, particularly after the

*Hopwood v. State of Texas* case, which banned the use of race in college admissions in Texas. In response, the University established the MIC, the mission of which is “to develop and prepare students for the multicultural society of today and the future by providing diverse educational opportunities and support services for all students.” As a part of this mission, the MIC promotes awareness, disseminates information, and promotes the retention and matriculation of Black/African American, Asian/Pacific Islander American, Mexican American/Hispanic/Latina(o), and Native American students at the University. MIC services consist of Program Co-sponsorship + Planning Assistance, diversity workshops, the Multicultural Leadership Institute (MLI), and scholarship information (MIC, 2005). Although the University has one of the most diverse student populations in the country for a university of its magnitude and is a national leader in the number of undergraduate degrees awarded to minority students, the enrollment includes on 1,945 African American students out of the total of almost 50,000 students (THECB, 2008).

Under the auspices of the MIC, the University has created an agency, called African American Affairs, for the specific purpose of addressing African American students’ needs. The African American Affairs states that its purpose, through its codirectors and UT Blacks Online chairs, is to provide support, enrichment services, and leadership development to Black students on campus and those in the greater Black community, as well as anyone interested in Black culture. This is achieved through dynamic programming and dialogue as well as through providing an online magazine for university students, providing information useful to the Black community.

The University also offers the First-Generation College Student Mentoring Program, which pairs mentors with first-generation college freshmen and provides a supported and informed transition to college life with the expressed purpose of guiding

them to become successful students and contributing members of the campus community. Although the University offers myriad mentoring programs, none is specifically targeted to address the needs of African American males.

The graduate school offers a Diversity Mentoring Fellowship program aimed at helping faculty members bring outstanding new graduate students to campus to add diversity to the campus and then mentor them. Fellowships are reserved for U.S. citizens with low socioeconomic status and/or clearly demonstrated financial need who are entering graduate school at the University for the first time.

In December 1996 the SAAB was founded on campus. Responding to the needs of African American males at Georgia Southwestern State University in Americus, Georgia, founder Dr. Tyrone Bledsoe had a vision to create an organization that would provide student development intervention and support to African American men enrolled in college. He designed the SAAB as a Black male developmental model to assist African American men to develop a more complete understanding of their responsibilities as college students and U.S. citizens.

Personal background knowledge of the University enabled the researcher to frame questions about the current campus environment in the course of the interviews.

### **Online Survey Contribution**

The students who participated in the online survey discussed their failures, their successes, and their support systems in attending a predominantly White institution of higher education. Theirs comments were grouped into nine categories: mothers, parental guidance/influence, mentors, community, extended family, academic preparation, self-efficacy/self perception, pressure to represent the African American community, and the predominantly White institution of higher education versus the African American

community. These themes were used by the researcher to develop the questionnaire for the seven participants in the face-to-face interviews.

### **Summary of the Interview Categories**

The responses by the seven interviewees, reflect African American male students in today's college environment, were summarized into categories. Some of the patterns displayed, such as issues concerning self-efficacy, support systems, and institutional support, were patterns consistent with national data and became quite evident within the interviews. More important, these profiles give voice to the participants that is not reflected in quantitative data. Including stories in the students' own voices as well as summaries from the interviews and online survey, discussions were recorded in an effort to reflect the students' true expressions. While the interviewed students agreed to share their stories, for the purposes of this study, only their first names (or in some cases pseudonyms) are used. Based on the survey and interview data, seven themes emerged across the online survey and the seven interviews.

1. *Reasons for going to college.* College was an expectation, not a choice. Both family and school supported this notion by providing support and encouragement. In addition, higher education was seen as a way to achieve a better life and to provide support for their families. Most of the students equated college with future success.

2. *Relationship with parents.* Generally, the students had strong positive relationships with their mothers and/or grandmothers. Some had positive relationships with their fathers; however, several did not have their fathers in their lives. In these cases, other male role models were often in the picture. Overall, the extended family (cousins, brothers, sisters) played a major role in the support system.

3. *Support systems.* Support systems played a large role in motivating these students to attend college. Most often, family (both immediate and extended) was



mentioned as the base of the support system. In addition, several students suggested the importance of like-minded friends, supportive teachers, and counselors in providing encouragement.

4. *Self-perception: aspirations and motivators.* Generally, the students had a good perception of themselves. Many recognized their positive traits, such as leadership, intelligence, and good morals. The aspirations mentioned in the interviews ranged from securing good jobs to providing for family in the future. While motivators were varied, most students mentioned certain members of their families as motivating them to graduate from college.

5. *Goals.* Both short-term and long term goals were important for these students. Generally, they had a sense of what they wanted to do with their lives. Many discussed their possible majors at the university, their desired jobs, and their dreams (such as having a family and providing for that family).

6. *High school experience and college access.* A successful K-12 experience seemed to translate into a seamless transition into higher education. All but one of the students had been classified in the top 10% of their high school class and had been in either Advance Placement or International Baccalaureate courses.

7. *Leadership.* Although the students did not necessarily classify themselves as leaders, they all had leadership positions in the organizations in which they were involved. They all took it upon themselves to be involved in projects and to take on additional responsibilities.

Qualitative methods involve identifying linkages and, at the least, the direction of impacts. This process relies on application of expert judgment, which requires understanding of data and linkages. Table 5 shows the linkages of the themes and the research questions.

Table 5

*Linkages of Interview Themes and Research Questions (RQ)*

Theme	RQ1 Societal dissonance	RQ2 Self- efficacy	RQ3 African American male mentorship	RQ4 Institutional support
Reason for going to college	X	X	X	X
Relationship with parents		X	X	
Support systems	X	X	X	X
Self-efficacy	X	X		
Goals	X	X		
High school experience and college access	X	X		X
Leadership	X	X		

**The Interviewee Descriptions***Andrew*

According to Andrew, from the time he was in elementary school, his parents had talked to him about the importance of attending college. He indicated that, by having the choice to attend college, he had been given an opportunity that many people had not been given. Andrew stated that it was difficult to be successful without a college degree because “you have to work a lot harder if you don’t have a degree to achieve those same goals.”

Andrew indicated that he had a good relationship with his parents. He credited them with instilling in him a strong work ethic.

My parents are from Jamaica, both of them were born and raised there. Well, they say immigrants are like 20% or 30% more likely to be successful and be

millionaires than people who are actually from the United States and live in the United States. I think it had a lot to do with their work ethics. My parents are kind of traditional with work ethic. You got to get the job done and you got to be hardworking. They have always instilled that image since I was a child.

Andrew stated that his family has been a system of support and that family members have served as important role models for most of his life. He specifically referred to the influence of his older sister, whom he called “mummy junior” because “she has been a sister, but moreover like a parental kind of figure.” He remembered her looking after him and talking to him like a friend and a parent. He also talked about his brother, 10 years older than him. His brother attended Morehouse but dropped out after a year. Andrew talked about how successful his brother has been but also mentioned how much harder it has been for him because he does not have a degree. Andrew expressed that that he can bypass that challenge “by simply getting an education.” Seeing his brother’s hard work has motivated Andrew to make sure that he is successful in college. His brother has helped him to realize the importance and value of a college education. Andrew also mentioned mentors with whom he had been matched at the university. He specifically mentioned one career mentor who had introduced him to the IT consulting field, which he is now considering because of the variety and opportunities that it offers. For Andrew, mentors have played an important part in his college experience.

Andrew classified himself as “self-driven” and stated that he had always done extremely well in school. He recalled that, throughout his schooling, he always took the initiative to do his homework. “I never came home and had my parents tell me to sit down to do my homework.” Andrew recognized that he is hardworking and referred to his involvement outside of the classroom.

I have a lot of things that I have to do outside of the classroom. In order to achieve that I can’t just be . . . . I can’t be lazy or try to study the night before a test. I literally have to push myself to make sure that I am planning out my time weekly, studying weeks in advance for a test or perhaps less than that, three or four days, whatever it might be. But also trying to you know maintain my

academic achievement as well as my extracurricular involvement through being hardworking.”

When asked about motivators, Andrew mentioned his sister. “She motivates me on a daily basis.” He said that she serves as a motivator because she recently graduated and was accepted into a competitive graduate program. Andrew mentioned that he relies on his sister’s wisdom because “she has been there and done that, so she can help me out.” He also mentioned that his sister serves as a role model in terms of how he should conduct relationships with others. “She has a lot of insight, and I look up to her a lot.”

Andrew expressed that his father told him “to aim for the moon and land on the stars.” His overall long-term goal is to be successful. In terms of setting shorter-term goals, Andrew has pledged to keep his GPA above 3.5. Although he had not reached this goal, he stated that aiming higher has helped him to achieve more.

Andrew attended the ninth grade in a high school in Long Island, New York, where the student population was approximately 85% to 90% African American. Few Advanced Placement courses were offered there. The next year he moved with his family to Texas and attended a predominantly White school that offered many Advanced Placement classes, in which Andrew enrolled: “If there was an AP course available, I was in it.”

Although Andrew did not necessarily consider himself a leader, he had taken on a leadership role the past year in the Black Business Students Association. The organization’s Web site was very basic and needed improvements. Andrew took the initiative to update the site because “Web sites are essential nowadays. Nobody knows about you, nobody cares about you if you really don’t have one.” He was currently in the midst of redesigning the site.

*Colin*

Colin remarked that college was never really an option for him, it was an expectation. Both of his parents and his grandparents attended college, so college was always a must. He recalled talking to his mother about this issue and remarked, “I’m a fourth-generation college student, which I know is extremely rare. I feel very blessed to be able to say that.” He added that he was surrounded in high school by people who wanted and expected to continue to higher education and “who also knew that high school wasn’t the last step in our system; it was a step in the process.” Colin mentioned that he had had wonderful teachers and counselors in high school who were very supportive and who wanted him to be successful.

Colin described a close relationship with both of his parents, with whom he talked every day. He mentioned that, when he was younger, he had been very close to his mother. When he became a teenager, he became closer to his father. His parents divorced when he was 16. He stayed with his father because he just wanted to stay with whom got the house so he could attend the same school. He remarked that, even now. “a lot of my friends have seen the way we interact, and they say that me and my dad are more like big brother and little brother versus father and son.” Colin also mentioned that his father was very supportive. His father had earned a Bachelor’s degree. He recalled that his father told him that he wanted Colin to be more successful than he had been and that he encourages Colin to think about graduate school and law school, wanting him to pursue all options. Andrew also has a close relationship with his mother and maternal grandmother, both of whom are educators. He recalled spending most major holidays and time in the summer with his grandmother when he was younger. She helped him to learn how to read and write before going into grade school. Colin referred to her as his “second mother.”

Colin described many types of support: family, friends, teachers, counselors, and peers. He expressed that, throughout his life, he has been surrounded by people who saw higher education as an expectation. He described support provided by his grandmother. He asserted that he “got a head start” because of the time he had spent with her during the holidays and summers learning how to read. He mentioned that he had surrounded himself with people in high school who were motivated to go to college. He expressed that this group of friends, teachers, and counselors provided encouragement because they believed that “high school wasn’t the last step in our system, it was a step in the process.”

Colin described himself as a social person who likes to have fun. He stated that he loves his family and friends and believes that everything about him is a reflection of them. He also described himself as a type of “peace keeper.” He recounted that in high school he liked to socialize with various groups of people and did not belong to just one group. When asked about what motivates him, Colin responded that both his family and representing Black males served as motivators.

I think, motivation is definitely my family. I want to make them proud. I make sure everything I do reflects the morals that they have instilled in me. Also, I think being a Black male is motivation, because I don’t want to say we are a dying breed, but especially on college campus, there aren’t very many of us. So, everything that we do is kind of under a magnifying glass, so that kind of keeps you motivated to keep going and keep breaking the stereotypes like this, and taking it one day at a time.

Colin classified himself as a step-by-step goal setter. He emphasized that, although he had long-term goals, such as graduating from college and attending graduate school, he believed in taking small steps to get to his overall goals, preferring to look at things day by day.

I definitely have long-term goals, like I definitely want to graduate and have a successful career and go to grad school, start a family. Before I can do that, I still have to deal with tomorrow, and making sure that I could get this paper in on time, and making sure I study for this test and everything.

Colin recalled getting mostly A's and B's in grade school and high school. He enrolled in AP classes throughout middle and high school. His favorite subjects in high school were History and English. "I like to write and I enjoyed Shakespeare plays and reading stuff that – it's just different, because a lot of people don't like Shakespeare. I actually really learned to enjoy it a lot. So, I really enjoyed English and History."

Although Colin did not classify himself as a leader, he has accepted leadership positions in the brotherhood organization on campus, serving as personal development chair, treasurer, and financial chair.

I'd say I'm a leader in a brotherhood organization I'm involved with here. I was the personal development chair in my sophomore year, and basically I was the liaison between the officers and the general membership body. I was kind of like the social chair if you will. I put together social activities for us to do as a group to foster brotherhood and get to know each other better and be a tighter knit group, so we weren't just an organization, we were friends.

#### *Damian*

Growing up, Damian wanted to be a lawyer because he had been exposed to the world of law through his mother's work. This was one of his primary reasons for wanting to attend college. In high school he began to take classes dealing with computers (his high school had a computer curriculum) and then decided that he was more interested in being a computer analyst. Damian credited his family for motivating him to attend college. He stated that attending college will allow him to do more: provide for his family, buy a house, retire, and manage money. He stated that he looked forward to "being able to provide for my family." He mentioned that seeing his family's situation had shown him how to "take the good stuff and implement it . . . and take the bad stuff and fight against it." Regarding his reasons for wanting to attend college, Damian said,

There was never a question of will I go to college. I was always going to go to college just because you can't make it without a degree. You have to find a job. You're lucky to find a job if you don't have a degree, you know? Work and

maybe luck into a career, but you can't—I just don't. . . . I don't want to own a business because I just don't want to luck into something. . . . I want a degree in something where I'll have no problems.

When asked whether a degree would help with security and betterment in life, he responded that he wanted to do something that was gratifying. He emphasized that it did not matter how hard it was to get there or how long it might take, so long as he enjoyed what he was doing.

Damian reported a very close relationship with his mother, with whom he talks every day. He described her as an “incredible woman, very strong.” He mentioned that his relationship with his father was not equally good. His parents had divorced when Damian was 2 years old, and he rarely saw his father. According to Damian, his father praised his brothers for their athleticism but was not so quick to recognize Damian's love of computers or performing arts. He mentioned that his relationship with his father was currently improving.

He kind of like—well, he apologized. He said, “Man, I didn't realize I was pushing your brothers to play sports. And now I know you're the one that finished school.” So now I think he kind of appreciates what my focus was when I was young.

When asked about support systems, Damian mentioned that two of his cousins had been a major while he was growing up. Both are about 15 years older than him and cared for him as babysitter when he was younger; now, both are lawyers in New York. He recalled spending time with them and being exposed to new things: new food, different cultures, Roth IRAs, and so forth. “They had an incredible influence on me, just in higher education and to make myself more knowledgeable on finances. I had never heard of a Roth IRA. They influenced me a lot, really positive.”

Damian described himself as an intelligent person with integrity. He took pride in the fact that he had never been drunk and did not frequent clubs, although he added that he still likes to have fun. Overall, he depicted himself as being “pretty serious.”



When asked about his goals, Damian stated that he was “extremely goal oriented” and that he had a “very detailed plan for the next 10 or 15 years, at least.” He mentioned that one of his goals before coming to college was to ensure that he did not have to pay to attend school. He was very proud that he had obtained grants and scholarships. He also mentioned his goal of attending summer programs to assist with his pre-med degree. Last year he had applied to three programs and had been accepted by all three. He chose to attend the program at the Yale University School of Medicine, an accomplishment of which he was very proud.

Damian cited mathematics as one of his favorite subjects in high school. He also enjoyed taking all of the science classes that he could, including chemistry and biology. During his junior and senior years he had participated in a Cisco networking program through his high school.

### *Jesse*

Jesse stated that he wanted to go to college to improve his life so that he could provide for his family, to include his immediate family and his mother and sister. He asserted that, because he was the only male in the family, he felt an obligation to care for his family and would like to be able to give them whatever they wanted out of life. He said that this goal always stays with him in the back of his mind. “Until I reach that goal of being able to be financially set, and give them whatever they want, then I’m not, my goal is not complete.” He disclosed that his mother and sister do not expect him to accomplish the goal, remarking, “That’s my goal, to be financially successful and be able to give them whatever they want, and that’s my goal in life.”

Jesse identified his mother as his major motivator, since she had raised him. He stated that his father, who was “not really the best influence” in his life, was not the man he was supposed to be and, as a result, had actually served as a motivator in a negative

sense. Jesse reported that his father left his mother, himself, and his sister when Jesse was 4 years old.

Because I guess he had the ability to bring two products in this world, my sister and me, he felt that he could leave us at anytime he wanted to, and go out and party late at night and just leave the burden on my mother anytime he wanted to.

He finished with a statement that defined his attitude and perception concerning life and his place in it:

Of course, that made me mad later on in life, as I experienced and got more knowledgeable about how the type of man my father really was, from my sister and my mother. I have always had a bad relationship with my father, it was never really the best of the best as it should have been, and it still isn't to this day. It made it even worse because my father is a lawyer, and he graduated from Stanford Law School. Being the smart man that he is, I don't understand how he can be such a knowledgeable man, and at the same time have no common sense whatsoever.

He added that he wanted to be "the man my father never was." In a sense, Jesse was motivated by his father's lack of involvement in his life. . . . I'm trying to be the man that he wasn't going to be, and I'm just trying to be the biggest influence in my mother's life." He mentioned that his mother and grandparents spoke to him on a daily basis about attending college and the life-long benefits that would follow completion of his studies.

Jesse asserted that, although his father was not there to help raise him, his mother had her family and his father's family to look to for support. He stated that, even after his parents' divorce, his family played an integral part in his academic success. He credited his extended family (grandparents, aunts, and uncles) for some of his early academic successes.

I have a lot of great uncles and aunts who have done well in their lives. There are many lawyers in my family, along with a lot of business professionals. With all that mixed, all those are harnessing in me, and I just like that driving force behind that. That is why I want to do great for my family, just the ability to do great one day for myself.

When asked about his aspirations, Jesse mentioned that one of his long-range goals was to become an investment banker. However, because his GPA was not high

enough, he knew that he must begin his career in a different area in the financial field, such as commercial banking, so that he can work his way up to investment banking.

That's my long-range role, to become an investment banker. I know that's what I'm going to do, and that's what I have always wanted to do. My cousin is an investment banker, and he told me all the great things that I could just do with that type of field, that type of job.

It was apparent that Jesse's family motivates him to excel in school and life. "I want to achieve the best that I can achieve so I can possibly one day give back to my mother and my sister."

Jesse remarked that he was a goal setter. He mentioned that, when he first enrolled at the university, he had not come with the right mindset. He had set a goal to maintain at least a 3.2 GPA. According to him, he "came in here being too cocky and thought I didn't have to study as much" since he had had a 4.0 GPA in high school. As a senior at the university, he was still trying to reach his desired GPA. In talking about his goals, Jesse mentioned the importance of joining a support group in college.

I should have joined [the SAAB brotherhood] right away. Or at least I should have joined some type of mentoring group that allowed me to understand that college is different from high school or high school is different from college, and I found that out real soon.

Jesse described himself as good at school: "I was good, A's up till 12th grade."

He mentioned that he took AP courses all the way through school, especially the recommended ones, including included English, Mathematics, Chemistry and Chemistry II.

When asked whether he considered himself to be a leader, Jesse gave an example of a leadership position that he currently held in one of his marketing classes. He is the designated liaison for his group, which means that he meets with the director of a nonprofit organization every other week.

*Justin*

“As far as me going to college, I guess I had my mother’s grandparents to help push me as well. They are the ones that always brought it up to me. I guess that is where my mother got it.” Justin stated that one of the reasons he wanted to go to college was that he had ambition.

I want to set myself up to live, I guess, a prosperous life. You know you got to go to college to get a job and make money to be happy. I’d rather have the ambition right now so I guess the best thing I could do was to go to college as far as conditioning myself, and staying ahead of everybody.

Although Justin’s parents were divorced when Justin was 6, he felt that both parents had raised him and had helped to support him equally. He stated that his mother had pushed him to complete admissions applications and scholarship applications.

She’d remind me and she’d make sure I’d fill them out, and I remember I missed a couple of deadlines and she was not pleased with me. . . . I remember I missed the deadline for the Ron Brown scholarship, and my mom was really not happy because she made sure that I guess that my resume was well built up. I was in Boy Scouts and then I became an Eagle Scout and my mother told me to put that on my resume as well. I know it sounds bad but she was definitely trying to fill in my resume, but until there was substance in it, she was always there in my face. . . . As far as me going to college, I guess I had my mother’s grandparents to help push me as well. They are the ones that always brought it up to me. My dad’s thoughts were, “Justin’s smart, Justin’s going to college,” and he sort of trusted the fact that reinforces my mother’s side of the family, and my grandparents that lived here.

Justin states that the overall relationship with his parents was good. His relationship with his father was a little better, just because his mother was a “pusher.” Although he felt that his relationship with his mother was somewhat strained, he credited her with a good portion of his success. He credited her for ensuring that he and his sister were exposed to many facets of life. He said that, although there was always an obligation to go to school, she made sure that they stayed involved and were well rounded. She took Justin and his sister to museums, she enrolled them in Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and she

made sure that they networked on all levels in the schools that that attended, which were primarily White.

Justin asserted that his whole family (mother, father, grandparents), all of whom were college educated, served as his support system. He credited his mother as the driving force behind most of the activities in which he participated that inevitably led to him entering college.

Justin described himself as personable, agreeable, dedicated, and a leader. When asked what was motivating him to graduate and strive to be successful, his response was,

I guess the obligation I feel to myself, but I guess even more so my family because I am oldest sibling and I have three other siblings below me, and I guess I'm also known in my family for being the goody two shoes but I just feel an obligation to do the right things because I know they're looking up to me. I guess one of my worst fears has been doing something that our family wouldn't be proud of due to me, because a lot of them looked up to me. So that's what my worst fear is. So I try to live up to that and fulfill everything because I feel that obligation to my siblings to give someone to look up to.

Justin stated that he sets broad goals for himself. His first goal pertained to his GPA, although he avoided stressing over the GPA, stating that putting too much emphasis on GPA and other obligations would lead to stress and not allow him to do well. Another goal was staying connected with his community and being involved. "I like to get involved in athletics, social service, and everything."

Justin recalled that he was in advance courses as early as elementary school.

In elementary school I was definitely in the hard classes, I don't know what they called it back then, something like that, I was definitely in that circle. I still remember taking that test in kindergarten, you know, to see what type of classes you got in.

A successful elementary experience translated into a successful middle school experience. He stated that, when he first entered high school, he did not want to apply for AP or IB classes because no one else he knew was in them. The following year, after taking only a few IB courses, he applied for all IB classes and was accepted. He

described the pressure that came with the IB courses, such as class ranking and Top 10% scores. He expressed his love for mathematics, particularly its predictability and the chance to work backwards and figure out why an answer was wrong. Then he described his trouble in writing a paper, particularly the ambiguity.

Algebra, geometry, I was good at that, because they were predictable. My English classes just—you could say, even now, just the art of writing a paper is stressful, and it'd be unambiguous what they'd want. [In the IB courses] the kids were really scratching for A's. That's when I started getting serious and had to start cracking the books just to get an A. So there was definitely pressure."

In high school Justin's mother started to talk about his academic performance and started to apply the pressure. "I mean that's definitely when my mom started taking it all in, because she wanted to make sure I positioned myself, so she stayed on me about everything making sure that I made it happen."

#### *Saviour*

Saviour indicated that he wanted to be a doctor because (a) he was pretty good with his hands; (b) he wanted to do something that was not boring, something where he could walk around and talk with people, while at the same time doing something with his hands and making a difference; and 3) he wanted to do something that would enable him to have enough money to take care of his family so they would not have to struggle, as they had in the past. Saviour stated that he wanted to go to college not only because he wanted to be a doctor but also because he knew that college was something that everyone where he lived did.

It was just . . . well, when you go to college . . . There was no, "If you're going to college" or "I hope I can get to college." Everyone was probably going to go to college, it just depended on what you want to do after that. That's definitely a sharp contrast to some of the kids I mentored, who don't even know if they're going to go.

He stated that his parents played a major role in his path to college.

If it wasn't for my parents being there and making me do stuff, and constantly re-enforcing me telling me do this, and do that, even though I hated it, I wouldn't be

there. If it wasn't for my teachers who taught me the materials that I would need to do well in my tests, what would I be, I would be nowhere. So it would definitely be my teachers and my parents. Oh yeah, and God of course.

Saviour indicated that he was probably a little closer to his mother. "My mom was a little more open." Saviour's parents are Nigerian; he described them as strict and religious, although he described his mother as very liberal and his father as conservative.

That it was a kind of clash of both worlds but I got like the best of both worlds. My mom was like if you want to sing in the choir, go sing in the choir, if you want to go play football, go play football so I did that. My dad was like, you know, "Keep your heads in the books," you know what I'm saying, because he always said, "What's the easiest way to keep something from the Black man? put it in the book." That's what my dad would say that all the time, so he was always like, "Concentrate on your studies, concentrate on your studies." My mom was like, "Concentrate on your studies but still have fun and be exposed to other type of things or whatever.

Saviour reported that he had a "rough" relationship with his father because his father did not want him to participate in many things that he liked to do, such as singing or playing sports. Although they had difficulties in their relationship,

He did teach me a lot of things, like the mentality that you don't let anyone tell you what to do and if you want something, you go get it. And my mom did teach me that you do what you like, you do what you're passionate about. . . . My relationship with them was pretty strong. I probably talked to my mom more than I talked to my dad just because it's harder for me to get along with my dad because I guess we're so alike. But I take what I don't want to do from him and I also take the assets I do like from him. So at the same time I am learning from both of them. So pretty strong relationships between both of them.

When asked about support as a young man, Saviour stated,

Yeah I had my aunt and my—well, first of all, I was always around my brothers, I have two other brothers, there are no girls, so we're like a football team, we are always in the back yard, always playing sports, always singing or whatever, always together. They were like my constant companions, that's just how we were, no one messed with either of us because we were always together. And the other person was always there but my aunt took care of us, she was like my sister. I didn't have a sister but, when I was in elementary school, she was in high school so she knew what we wanted for Christmas, she knew what we liked eating, like she could identify on us, with like levels that my parents couldn't identify with us and she put our socks on, she put lotion on us when we were little, like that type of aunt, so she was always there. Even right now she'll call me, ask me if I'm all right, stuff like that. So she has just always been there, she's like a second mom definitely.

Saviour stated that several things served as motivators during his young successful life thus far.

Basically, a lot of things served as a motivator: my family, I think my mom motivated me a lot because she sacrificed a lot of things for me. She was a certified nurse assistant, they don't get paid that much, cleaning their poop or whatever, stuff like that, stuff that she really doesn't want to do. She wanted to be a nurse when she was pregnant with me, she was actually in nursing school but she had to drop all that stuff. So she had to drop a lot of things for me. We were doing well in school, all we had to do is do well in the school, that's all we had to do at this age, that's all we had to do. So if you're not doing well in the school and your mom is sacrificing for you, I mean what is that saying? Is that saying, "Mom, I don't really care about what you're doing?" In college there are no more excuses; either I am going to do well or I am not going to do well. Either I am going to say, you know, "Mom, I appreciate what you're doing" or I am going to say, "Mom, I don't really care what you're doing for me." And so I made the decision to do well. I figured I had to do better than the average person, study more than the average person, stay in more than the average person, should get accomplished what I wanted to accomplish. That's actually why I tried to do the medical school thing. So that was my motivational factor: It was probably just my mom and appreciating what she did for me.

Saviour described himself as a "very, very goofy person."

I am extremely goofy, I am not so goofy that I am immature goofy but I am a very goofy person and I have a really dry sense of humor and people let me know that all the time. I am also like a really hard worker, so that's one thing, really hard worker. I kind of have like a shy mentality because my dad just kept reinforcing everything in me, saying, "If you want anything in life, you have to go get it because people aren't really going to give it to you, especially in this world and in this country." So I have a really, really hard mentality, hard worker, and I like having fun, too. So if I am not having fun with something, it's really, really hard for me to get going with it.

When asked about his goals, he responded,

Oh yeah, I set goals for myself, that's another weakness. I set long-term goals for myself but sometimes, if you just set long-term goals like, you can't just say, you know, "By the end of this semester I want to get an A in this class." Because if you don't have anything in between, then it's going to be hard because it's going to come to the last second. I have found out that, when I was successful, it would be because of the fact that I set timed goals, like I would say "from this time to this time I'm going to be doing this."

Saviour said that in elementary school he received nothing but A's; middle school was straight A's and a few B's, and then in high school he was accepted into a



program called the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, which he described as the most devastating blow to his social life.

I was dying but I had a great foundation from my elementary school life, my teachers in elementary school were definitely involved in my education, and if I hadn't had that good foundation, then I don't think I would have been doing well in high school or even now. Therefore, I had a really good foundation in middle school and elementary school. So that definitely helped me and I think those teachers that helped me helped me succeed.

He said that, if he could do it again, he would take AP courses as opposed to IB because the AP courses transfer better into college credit. Savior's favorite courses in high school were biology and mathematics.

Saviour stated that he is a leader.

There are certain things that I take the initiative to do and other people won't. Furthermore, just taking the initiative to do something, I consider myself a leader just because, when I walk around, people look at what I'm doing and sometimes I feel like if someone's looking up to you and somehow emulating anything you're doing, then you're a leader in some aspect, even if it's your little brother. So that's how I consider myself a leader. I feel like the best thing that you can do as a college student is mentor. That's really important to me because you can identify with them on levels that the teacher can't, because there's like 20 students and one teacher compared to like one-on-one, one-on-two type stuff. So I am leader in this aspect because these kids are like juniors or seniors and they look up to me and when I am talking to them, they're listening. They really listen to everything I'm saying.

### *Wayne*

Wayne indicated that he had had options about whether he was going to college or not. "There weren't really reasons for me to go to college; my dad always gave me a choice: either army, college, or under the bridge and I chose college." His brother and sister went to college, so it was just understood that he was going to college. "We had talks about what is the best college for me, but it was never any issue of whether I was going and I was always a bright individual so we kind of knew I was going, that is why I wanted to go."

Wayne asserted that his father did not play an integral role in his life, nor did he have anything to do with Wayne's success. Wayne was raised by his aunt and uncle, whom he referred to as his "real parents."

Actually, I stayed with my aunt and uncle, they were who I physically called mom and dad. But my actual birthparents, I never really got to know them. My mom died when I was in ninth grade. It was a really strange relationship because she had other children, so we didn't really get to talk. As [far] as my father, I just act as if he is out there. He doesn't really add any value, he is my aunt's brother, so we talk about him, but it's not like a deep conversation. Personally, right now I don't even know where he is.

Wayne's support system—sacrifice and giving—played an important part in his academic success and his road to college. He described his aunt and uncle as providers to the point that they gave up much for themselves to ensure that he was successful.

The only thing my father could have added was something of a monetary value because it was hard. My aunt and uncle have two children of their own that they had; they are fairly close to age and then they just put them through college. Then 10 years later they just get back to breaking even and then I had to go through college.

Wayne's brother and sister are 11 and 13 years older than him. Chiefly because of this age difference, he was able to go to them for assistance when his parents could not provide it.

They provided like they were young parents because my aunt and uncle they are in their 50s, getting ready to be in their 60s. So they couldn't do things that I needed them to do, like go to games or take me to the park or something like that. So it was good having older cousins closer to me because they could fill in that role.

Wayne has always wanted to be a lawyer because he has always had a passion for law shows on television

What serves me as a motivator for me, what helps to get me through school is knowing that I am a role model for somebody else. I like to hold myself to higher standards so I just I like to think you never know who is looking at you, whether you are just going to class or going to church, so try to hold yourself to higher standards.

He classified himself as a motivated leader with passion, the type of person who is ready to aim, set, and then fire. “I am just innovative, I am very creative, I am very passionate.” He alluded that sometimes he needs a little help with the behind-the-scenes work, describing himself as

more of an idea kind of person. I just come up with good ideas, it is just who I am. Now as far as with the managing side, it is kind of hard for me to manage because I am so creative, I am always thinking of new things, to get those things done or accomplished.

When asked about goals, his eyes lit up.

That’s one of my personal traits. I try to set as many goals as I can. Every year in the fall I make a checklist of what I want to accomplish each semester. I just go through that and I accomplish them. There have been times I have accomplished everything on my list, and then there have been times when I have not accomplished anything on my list. When I do accomplish things, I look at what I did to accomplish my goal, and when I don’t, I look at things as far as why didn’t you get what you wanted to get done and for future reference. If not, how are you going to go about getting those things done?

Wayne seemed to be very mature and insightful about life, what he wants out of it, and how to go about getting what he wants.

Wayne indicated that he had always excelled in the classroom as well as socially. He was in the top 10% of his class in middle school, and the trend continued in his high school years. Wayne was enrolled in advance courses all the way through high school.

While in the seventh grade he moved to the suburbs,

which was an extremely better area than where I was going, it was really was, but the class work, it was a struggle. It was a real struggle because in middle school they were way more prepared than I was. To the point where I was reading books that they had already read, just on my own, “Mockingbird” and other different books. We were just reading on our own, so it was like I had to play “catch-up” for probably my whole seventh-grade year. And then by eighth grade I got the swing of things and then finally in ninth grade I was in the advanced placement courses.

He expressed a life-long passion for history, English, Government, and his first chemistry and physics classes.

Currently, Wayne held an officer position in the Black Business Students Association and in the African-America coach committee. He classified himself as a motivated leader with passion, the type of person who is ready to aim, set, and then fire. “I am just innovative, I am very creative, and I am very passionate.” He expressed that leaders must hold themselves to a higher standard, which helps them in other aspects of life.

### *Summary*

This section has summarized the responses of the interviewees according to the themes that emerged from analysis of their overall responses: (a) reasons for going to college, (b) relationship with parents, (c) support system, (d) self-perception: aspirations and motivators, (e) goals, (f) high school experience and college access, and (g) leadership. These categories are such that the research takes place in the natural setting, employs multiple methods of data collection, is emergent rather than prefigured, is based on the researcher’s interpretation viewed holistically, is reflective, uses both inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning processes, and employs a strategy of inquiry (Creswell, 2003).

### **Addressing the Research Questions**

This section provides an analysis of the interviews and the qualitative data to address the four research questions that guided the study. The section closes with a cross-case analysis and a summary.

#### *Research Question 1*

Research question 1 asked, *What is the perceived influence of societal dissonance on the African American male’s academic success?* Festinger’s (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance deals with discrepancies among cognitions. Festinger defined these cognitions as “any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment,

about oneself, or about one's behavior" (p. 62). In a related application of the theory, societal cognitions are based on beliefs and perceptions of people (society) instead of a single person's beliefs about himself/herself or his/her behavior. These societal cognitions play a major role in the misrepresentation of African American males in today's society.

The seven young men interviewed for this study had encountered many obstacles, in the form of low expectations, negative stereotypes, and unrealistic pressures to represent the entire Black race; yet, they had been successful in continuing their journey into and through higher education. Society sends out inconsistent and sometimes unjustified messages about perceptions and attitudes toward African American males. These young men, like many others, challenged societal stereotypes and social dissonance to achieve their academic success. A selection of their interview responses summarizes these challenges to the stereotypes and their solutions for societal dissonance.

Andrew recognized the general social stereotypes of the Black community, particularly young Black males. He saw it as his obligation to challenge that stereotype through his personal behavior.

I think the Black community and a lot of the Black males here are perceived to being lazy. And to an extent we are. I think it ties back to the stereotypes of Black males and the Black community in general, that it's so much easier to sell drugs or to rap or to play basketball and be successful than to put your face in a book and work hard for 4 years in order to achieve that same goal. . . . I have always tried to be a noble person and tried to have some sense of integrity. You can't really *break* a stereotype, but you can be an *exception* to a stereotype.

Andrew recognized that, whether or not by choice, he was a representative of his race in everyday situations.

I don't want the Black community to continue to be perceived as being lazy, which motivates me on a daily basis to make sure that I am noble and do not need to achieve for my personal success but for the success of the Black community. It is easy to stereotype a race, especially the Black race. When you

are in the class and you are the only Black student there, when you say something in class, you are a representative of the Black race. For a lot of people, you are the only Black person that they interact with or may see. So if you say something out of turn or you act a certain way, you behave in a certain way, it only reinforces what they see on TV.

Damian pointed out that he was not the only representative of his race on the campus. He was sometimes reluctant to be identified with some peers, and sometimes he was embarrassed or at least uncomfortable about the way some other African American males represented his race.

I think it would have an influence on anyone. Whether negatively or positively, if someone does not believe in you or has a negative perception of you, it can have an influence on how you perform in school. You hear about that kind of stuff all the time on TV and in the news, about how some guy killed his mother and father because he was abused as a kid. The abuse doesn't always have to be physical for it to affect a person. I think it's the same for Black males in college. The teachers don't think you are smart, the students don't think you are smart, it's hard but you have to get over it.

When you see someone acting out, wearing baggie pants or just clowning, which you see too often on this campus, it's like, "There goes *my* reputation. That's how *I'm* going to be viewed." You hear someone coming down the sidewalk and talking really loud, and you turn around and it's a Black guy. Do you know how that is? It's embarrassing. . . . I'm not the only Black person on a predominantly White campus, it's [already] a lot of pressure to fight those stereotypes. And then it's frustrating when you have peers who don't care . . . .

Jesse framed the social dissonance experienced by African American males on the campus of an institution of higher education in terms of competition with students of other races.

I spend so much time in the library trying to compete with the other cultures because I know that they are doing the same amount of work that I am doing, and that they are trying to compete with me for the same jobs . . . later on in life.

I think it [societal dissonance] plays a major part on how we interact with the other students and then, how it affects us in class. I often find myself taking time out to think about what I want to say in class. Instead of just speaking my mind, or blurting something out, I take time to think about it. So I guess it's good and bad. Good because I don't talk much, but when I do, it is usually of quality. The bad would be, no one should have to be that scared to share their thoughts. I think negative stereotypes and looking down on people plays a huge role in one's college experience, actually in life.

[In one class] instead of being the team leader (which I should have been) and instead of speaking my mind and my opinions, I was actually in the background. I was actually at the bottom of the totem pole, maybe because the people around me were so intelligent. I felt maybe ashamed to speak my mind. We had to present a project to our class, but working with this group, I felt [they were] smarter than I was. A little bit smarter than me. Can you feel sometimes when a person is smarter or has that intelligence level? It's kind of above you, sometimes by the way they present themselves.

Once I was placed in that group among the other smart business majors, I had to keep that image intact; but at the same time, it kind of defeated me. It is kind of hard to look upon that situation. Let's say we are both going in for the interview for the same job; the employer can't look on both of us and say, "Alright, I'm going to pick him because . . . or I can't X you out because you weren't raised in the same environment."

Saviour presented one constructive solution to challenge negative stereotypes about the African American male held by people on the higher education campus in particular and in society in general. He saw his role as a "educator" of society regarding the image of the African American male. Inferred in his description is his assumption of role model as well as educator.

My job is a job, but it's not a job. We put on programs . . . that promote awareness and spread information, because a lot of people come here, especially White people, and they don't know anything about other cultures. They say things like, "What's life's like being Black?" or "I've never seen a Black person before." It's like all they see is what they see on TV, so when they walk across the street, they don't know any other dimension. So we try to let them see another side. In that aspect I'm a leader because, when people see me and they see what I am all about, they see something different, something they've never seen before. So I try to teach them. It's just in small ways, I'm not going to go down my résumé or anything, it's just small things like that.

I don't like to make excuses for anybody or make excuses for why I have not done well on a test, or something like that. But truthfully, I think being negatively stereotyped or perceived as bad hurts. I always try to treat everyone with the same amount of respect and teach people whenever I have an opportunity, but when you walk in to class and you have already been judged, it is pretty hard to act normal. When you are constantly looked upon as bad or not able to do the work, sometimes you can't help but start to believe it. That is when you have to be strong and not let that stop you from being successful.

Without saying so directly, Wayne implied that African American males on campus may not be as different in their social roles as some have presumed. He described them as being categorized in much the same way as other males on campus.

I would say Black males in this campus are divided into three categories: athletes, Greeks and regular folks. If you are not an athlete, you are nothing; if you are not a Greek, you are nothing; and then you fall into that category of “just so and so.” That’s the way we talk about each other here . . . . You [are defined] by a title or a role and you get lumped into one of the three.

### *Analysis for Research Question 1*

Although the participants in this study all alluded to the fact that the negative stereotypes and perceptions of Black males on campus and in society *could* have a negative influence on their academic performance, the general consensus seemed to be that this particular group of young men used this deficit perception of Black males to their advantage. Jesse, Damian, and Saviour all stated directly that the negative pressures and stereotypes of societal dissonance would affect a Black male’s academic matriculation into college in an adverse way. When asked whether he thought that dissonance on a societal level had an influence on a Black male’s academic success, Jesse responded, “I think it plays a major part on how we interact with the other students and then, how it affects us in class.” This clearly shows that the deficit perspective unjustly given to Black males at times has the potential to affect Black males, not only in life but in the classroom as well. This group of young men addressed the issue of negative stereotypes, feelings of isolation, and low academic expectations by performing well in the classroom. Saviour went a step further, stating that it was his “job to act as an educator,” to teach others when confronted with issues of a deficit perception of Black males. He also said, “I don’t like to make excuses for anybody or make excuses for why I have not done well on a test, or something like that. But truthfully, I think being negatively stereotype or perceived as bad hurts.” Andrew took it upon himself to address this obstacle by ensuring that his personal behavior did not match that of the stereotypical young Black male.

While the findings related to this question showed evidence of the participants doing exceedingly well academically despite obvious feelings of isolation and low



expectations held by others, one participant expressed feelings of societal pressures affecting his academic performance.

It was surprising to hear from Saviour that in 2007 students of the African American race were still receiving questions asking “what it is like to be Black.” As stated earlier, these young men, like many others before them, have challenged societal stereotypes and social dissonance to achieve academic success. Andrew summarized the ultimate response to this research question best: “I have always tried to be a noble person and tried to have some sense of integrity. You can’t really *break* a stereotype, but you can be an *exception* to a stereotype.”

From this, one can assume a direct relationship between societal dissonance and African American male’s academic performance, and successful matriculation into college. It is not the intention of the researcher to prove that negative stereotyping is exclusive to African American males nor to excuse the poor academic performance of Black males in college. In agreement with Damian, it is the opinion of this researcher that negative stereotyping has the *possibility* of adversely affecting anyone. These data are offered for consideration.

The findings seem to be consistent with research reported by Steele and Aronson (1995), who postulated that, when a person’s social identity is attached to a negative stereotype, that person will tend to underperform in a manner consistent with the stereotype. Steele and Aronson attributed the underperformance to a person’s anxiety that he or she will conform to the negative stereotype. The anxiety manifests itself in various ways, including distraction and increased body temperature, all of which diminish performance level.

### *Research Question 2*

Research question 2 asked, *What is the perceived influence of self-efficacy on the African American male's academic success?* Self-efficacy is an impression that one is capable of performing in a certain manner or attaining certain goals (Ormrod, 2006). It has been defined as a belief that one has of one's capabilities to execute courses of actions required to manage situations. Not to be mistaken with *efficacy*, which is the power to produce an effect, *self-efficacy* is the belief (whether or not that belief is valid) that one has the power to produce that effect. For example, a person with high self-efficacy may engage in a more health-related activity when an illness occurs, whereas a person with low self-efficacy would experience feelings of hopelessness (Sue, Sue, & Sue, 2005), related in some ways to the principle of locus of control.

One of the key issues in this study is the distinction between *self-esteem* and *self-efficacy*. Self-esteem relates to a person's sense of self-worth, whereas self-efficacy relates to a person's perception of his or her ability to reach a goal. This study focuses on self-efficacy because the lack of self-efficacy is one of the obstacles that Black males encounter in academia, often leading to low academic performance. Feelings of self-efficacy are influenced by home and school environments, both of which affect how a person relates to others in society. Since one's belief in one's abilities is largely formed through social interactions in the dominant home and school environments, low self-efficacy is difficult to overcome.

The level of self-efficacy observed in the seven young men interviewed in this study was extremely high. The researcher found the young men to have a strong belief not only in themselves but also in their academic abilities. Generally, the young men's self-efficacy appeared to have been shaped through interactions with their support

systems, particularly family, friends, and teachers. Excerpts from some of the interviews illustrate this high level of self-efficacy and some of the sources of that confidence.

Andrew's self-confidence and his strong sense of self-efficacy was expressed throughout his interview. He attributed his success to his "drive" and dedication and related it to his sense of honor.

I am most proud of my drive and my dedication to my studies. My GPA is above 3.0. [Although] I would like it to be higher, I work hard on a daily basis and I have worked hard over the past year to achieve it. I have always tried to be a noble person and tried to have some sense of integrity.

Damian's strong sense of self-efficacy was expressed through his focus on making and achieving goals.

I am extremely goal oriented. I have a very detailed plan for the next 10 or 15 years, at least. Before I came to college I said, of course, "I don't want to have to pay anything." I got that accomplished. I'm pre-med and so I don't want to spend my summers taking summer school and working at a crappy job.

The belief in yourself is very important. If you don't believe in yourself, why should anyone else? No one is going to just hand you anything in life, so you have to believe that you are capable and can do it. When you start doubting yourself is when you fail.

Jesse's goal was very specific, and his clear confidence that he would achieve it reflected a strong sense of self-efficacy.

I want to achieve the best that I can achieve, so that I can possibly one day give back to my mother and my sister, who also raised her and me at the same time. I just like that driving force behind that. That's why I want to do great for my family, just the ability to do great one day for myself.

While I believe in myself, I think the way you feel about yourself can be influenced by others. I think this kind of goes back to the first question. I have always had a great belief in myself and my abilities until I came to UT. I still think that I am very capable in doing whatever I put my mind to, but I still think society influences your self-belief.

Justin expressed his strong sense of self-efficacy through his dedication to high moral standards.

I hold a lot of pride in upholding my principles of daily living . . . and shaping my own values. During the [elementary] school days and middle school [I was] pressured to compromise. But I think I've done a good job. I guess I give credit

to my upbringing as far as sticking to those morals and being true to them daily. I would describe myself as personable, agreeable, and definitely dedicated.

While Saviour seemed to be more self-critical than the other interviewees, he still reflected his perception of a high degree of self-efficacy. He described his achievements in terms of competing with himself as well as with others to achieve his goals. His point about “slowing down” and “taking it as it is” can be interpreted as coming from his sense of overall self-efficacy, in which he can “afford” to ease up on the competitive nature from time to time.

I think I am really hard on myself sometimes. . . . Not only am I hard on myself, I am a competitive person by nature. So I can be competitive with myself, I can be competitive with other people. I think sometimes there comes a point where you are a little bit too competitive and there’s a point where you just need to slow down and take it as it is.

Self-efficacy is the key. You have to believe in yourself if you are going to be successful in life. When you look at successful business people, they all had a great belief in themselves. There have been times when I was unsure if I could pick up on something, but again, I have always been successful in the past, so that is when that belief in myself comes into play and I know I will do well.

### *Analysis for Research Question 2*

As stated earlier, the researcher found these young men to have a strong belief not only in themselves but also in their academic abilities, although at times their belief in their academic abilities did come in to question. The findings in this study seemed to be consistent with research reviewed in Chapter II, for example with Lee (2000), who stated that it is possible to educate all children, including Black males, at high levels and that this perspective should be embraced by all schools. During the interviews, most of the participants stated that they were most proud of their GPA. It was obvious to the researcher that there was a direct relationship between self-efficacy and GPA, presumably the higher the GPA, the higher the level of self-efficacy. Based on several comments made during the interviews, it also seemed that the participants who had structured goals tended to have a higher level of self-efficacy as well.

Some of the participants commented that their self-efficacy was derived from competition with other students. Others described achievements in terms of competing with oneself as well as with others to achieve goals. Saviour made a point about “slowing down” and “taking it as it is,” which could be interpreted as coming from his sense of overall self-efficacy, in which he could “afford” to ease up on the competitive nature from time to time because of that belief.

These findings are consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter II. According to Moore (2001, as cited in Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 5), “What separate African American male students from their Caucasian counterparts are the unmeasurable burdens of racism, discrimination, and negative stereotypes.” These oppressive barriers are interpreted as messages of intellectual incompetence, which at times have negative effects on the academic identity and success of African American male students. “Success for African American males has less to do with academic capability and more to do with motivation, self-efficacy, commitment, and follow-through, which ultimately leads to success” (p. 36). For many young African American men, the ability to succeed in the education system depends on the ability to navigate through the barriers and constraints of society.

### *Research Question 3*

Research question 3 asked, *What is the perceived influence of African American male mentorship on the African American male’s academic success?* After much deliberation and conversation with the participants in the study, it came as a surprise to this researcher that African American male mentorship did not have a significant impact on the success of these seven young men. A common theme from the interviews with these young men was that African American males could be successful without adult Black males playing a major role in their tutelage. By no means is this researcher

implying that African American male fathers, mentors, teachers, and/or role models are not important in a young Black male's life. However, the interviews conducted in this study indicated that, with a solid overall support system, Black males can achieve success both personally and academically. Upon the realization that Black male mentorship does not play a significant role in achievement for some African American men, the focus of the question shifts from the perceived influence and impact of African American male mentorship on academic success and matriculation to the general lack of African American male mentors, particularly on the campuses of institutions of higher education.

The lack of African American male mentors for African American boys and young men has continued to be a pertinent issue for today's Black males. This deficiency starts in the home environment, since Black male roles models and mentors are scarce in many neighborhoods. Kunjufu (2006) asserted that the deficiency of role models continues into the educational pipeline, where over 83% of educators who come into contact with Black males are Caucasian females. When examining the lack of male mentorship from this perspective, the issue is evident and problematic. However, as reflected in the interviews in this study, it appears that these successful African American males, seemingly without the presence of Black males in their life to mentor or guide their path, have found substitutes to fill that void. Excerpts from the interviews provide some sense of the source of those substitutes and their roles as mentors.

Andrew did not complain about the lack of an adult Black male to serve as a mentor. Instead, he eagerly named his sister as the chief mentor in his personal and academic life.

I look to my sister a lot and she motivates me on a daily basis. When I am kind of down and I need help, I try to figure out what to do in certain situations, and most of the time she has been there and done that, so she can help me out. Outside of

the academic room, as far as our relationship with females—relationships with other individuals, period—she has a lot of insight and I look up to her a lot.

Colin did not look to faculty or staff at the university to provide mentoring services for him. Instead, he looked to his peers.

One thing that I take pride in is the African American brothers on campus. We kind of keep each other motivated. Like, if we get kind of discouraged or caught up in something, we keep each other motivated and we keep each other going. One thing I have noticed about being in college is that you can't get through it alone.

Damian shared that, if he had had an African American male in his life, that presence would have been perceived as a positive aspect.

I think it would definitely help. I grew up without a father or a male figure in my life, so I can only imagine that something like that would help a Black male in life and school. I think it would have made it easier to go to someone when I had questions about life, someone that could understand where I am coming from. My mother and sister were great, but it just helps if it's someone that can relate a little better.

As he saw it, Jesse's guidance did not come from higher education faculty, or even from teachers in public school. Instead, he identified his parents as his mentors.

My biggest motivator was probably my mother, since she raised me since I was about 4 years old because of the separation between my mother and my father, who wasn't really the best influence in my life. He wasn't the man he was supposed to be and, as a result, that has been another motivator: trying to be the man that he wasn't going to be, and just trying to be the biggest influence in my mother's life. My mom was really a pusher—I can credit her for a lot of things.

While giving strong credit to his mother (as a positive model and mentor) and his father (as a negative model and thus motivator), Jesse poignantly noted the lack of an adult Black male to serve as a mentor in his life:

I wish I would have met some brother like yourself who really, really taught me or told me, "Jesse, take your time, just take 12 hours in your freshman year and then extend it up to 15 hours in your sophomore year and 15 hours as your junior then."

Although personally it [lack of adult Black male] had no influence on me, I think it has the potential of being very influential on a young Black male. Like I said earlier, my father wasn't there for me and I still made it because of my mother. But if my father was the man he was suppose to be, I may have become a lawyer like he is or something like that. I think I was always suppose to go to college, so

I don't think that would have mattered, but maybe it would have influenced the path I took in life.

Saviour had no comment about the mentoring role of faculty or staff (Black or otherwise) at an institution of higher learning. Again, he identified a parent as his mentor.

My dad just kept reinforcing everything in me saying, "f you want anything in life, you have to go get it, because people aren't really going to give it to you, especially in this world and in this country."

Saviour added a general commentary about the significance of a racial match between mentor and mentee, whether on a campus of higher education or in life in general. His comments imply that, while it is helpful to have a mentor of the same race in any area of life, a "specialist" (such as a faculty member in an institution of higher education) could be especially helpful.

When it comes to mentors, it does not have to be a Black person. But because the person is of the same race, I think he understands where the person is coming from. It's rare that you find someone who truly understands. . . . Can you really understand what it is to come from a household where you don't have to speak correct English, where you speak whatever works within your family, where you don't learn all these numbers and stuff like that? Coming from an area like that, the only person that will understand is the person from that area.

[Mentoring] definitely helped me. While I got along a little better with my mother, my father was great, he was so knowledgeable, I could ask him anything and he would always have an answer. I can't say it was just my father that helped me get into college, or who made me study, because my mother played a major role as well. So again, while I think it helps, it wasn't the sole reason.

### *Analysis for Research Question 3*

Prior to data collection it was assumed that the role of the African American male mentor would exert significant influence on academic achievement; analysis of the results of the interviews did not support that assumption. Of those four, only Saviour and Colin reported that their fathers had played a pivotal role in their lives in general and their academic success in particular by challenging them academically. The other two



participants with male figures in their lives considered that they had been successful without the influence of a male role model.

As alluded to earlier, a common theme from the interviews with these young men was that African American males can be academically successful without adult Black males playing a major role in their tutelage. The interviews indicated that, with a solid overall support system, a Black male can achieve high levels of success, both personally and academically. Only three of the seven participants in the study (Andrew, Saviour, and Wayne) were raised in two-parent households. Although it might be assumed that the other four participants, raised in single-parent households, might have been influenced negatively by the lack of an African American male role model, the responses from these participants did not support that assumption. The participants who were raised in single-parent households seemed to have other individuals who served as mentors in support systems that did not include a male role model. In fact, Andrew was quick to name his sister as his mentor, and Colin and Jesse identified their mothers as their mentors and motivators.

Although the analysis leads to the conclusion that African American male mentors are not a necessity for successful matriculation by a young African American male, Saviour noted that, although it is not necessary that mentors on campus or in life be of the same race as the mentee, it is helpful for the mentor to understand “where the mentee is coming from.” This would indicate that a match of race between mentor and mentee could be an advantage. Overall, whether these African American males were utilizing a formal or informal support system, the perceived support seemed to have a significant influence on their ability to enter and continue in college. In fact, all but one of the participants stated that they were satisfied with their support systems, which they described as having a significant influence on their academic performance. Even though

the overall support system was important to these students, the assumption that the mentor be an African American male was not supported. Thus, the findings related to this research question were not consistent with research reviewed in Chapter II. While Foster and Peele (1999) discussed factors that were effective in the success of Black males in education, one of those factors being the presence of African American male teachers, this study has failed to support that notion but has validated the notion of the positive influence of support systems in general.

#### *Research Question 4*

Research question 4 asked, *What is the perceived influence of institutional support on the African American male's academic success?* Many of the participants discussed programs that targeted diversity issues during orientation activities. Several also mentioned groups on campus that provided an outlet to interact with a variety of people, as well as groups that specifically provided an opportunity to identify with other African American men. While acknowledging the value of these groups, most of the participants commented that most of the resistance that they had encountered on campus came in the form of preconceptions held by others on campus, not the University in particular. For example, Saviour stated,

Higher administration does give us all these opportunities; they give us everything we need. There are basic amenities, tutoring sessions; we have like five mentor programs just in the Black community. We have facilities and we have so much at our disposal, but we choose not to educate ourselves. . . . At some point you have to take it upon yourself as an African American male student to quit putting the blame on everybody else. . . . No one is always going to give you the answer, sometimes you are going to have to go out there looking for the answer. If you are struggling in class, they have tips and ways and just anything at your disposal for you to deal with that. But I think we choose to not do that because the answer is not being fed to us through a spoon.

Several participants mentioned programs on campus that were particularly helpful upon their arrival to campus. One remarked, "I would love to see [organizations such as SAAB] grow more and influence more people." The participants stated that the

programs that addressed stereotypes and racial issues openly and candidly were most effective.

Damian recognized the role of the university in providing services geared to minority groups, such as African American male students.

Well, for one orientation was incredible. There were a lot of things, a lot of little shows we had on stereotypes and stuff like that. I don't necessarily know if they talk to you about actually making better cultural decisions, but there's help there, but I don't even know if it's problematic. I'm not like a person who says it's our entire fault. We need to get together, you know.

I think the school tries to make all of its students successful, because they have a reputation to uphold. I don't think they specifically target Black males, I think they try to help minorities. I think they still have a long way to go, but it's a start. If UT hired more Black professors, I think that would help with the success of Black males.

However, Damian recognized that the work of university organizations, as well as faculty, staff, and students, is far from finished.

We still have mindsets of people here [on campus] that need to change, White people and other people. The thing I hate most about perceptions on campus is that they tend to report only bad things, and not really report good things that are happening in our community. That happens a lot here.

Others were less than enthusiastic about the institution's motivations for offering specialized services for the African American male student. Wayne stated,

What I have seen here at UT is that the programs are being done just to say that they [UT] are providing a program, the programs don't really do anything.

In agreement, Jesse remarked,

The institution has a certain responsibility to each of their students. I think UT tries to meet that responsibility with programs and things like that. Even though they offer programs like tutoring and some mentoring, I still feel as if I don't belong sometimes. I had a friend who graduated a couple of years ago, and he said he felt no loyalties to UT because he didn't feel like he was a part of UT, he didn't get that "Longhorn" experience that everyone else talks about. I never knew what he meant by that, I mean come on, we are at UT. As my time here went on, I started to understand what he meant, it's like we'll [UT] let you in the school, but you still are not a part of us. I don't know, I can't explain it. So I don't know if the school can have an influence, but I think it could definitely do a better job of making us feel wanted, or more accepted.

Saviour did not address the services of the institution directly. Instead, he focused on the perception widely held by students that being Black is equated to being not smart.

When you first go into a class, . . . it is not the pressure from your teacher, [it's mostly] pressure from your peers. You walk in there and you know you have to be on your ground because, when they look at you, they see a Black person. . . . And they think immediately, "Oh! You must not be smart. You are not intelligent." . . . So you have to prove to them that you are a very smart person, that you know what you are talking about. So there is that pressure right there.

Saviour then described in interesting twist of perceptions: Being smart seems to translate to being "not Black."

And then there is also that pressure: "Okay, when I do prove to them that I am smart, that I know what I am doing, that I take my studies seriously, all of a sudden I'm not Black! It's just like, "Oh! But *you* are not Black." . . . People . . . are not trying to be actively racist. But these conceptions are stuck in your head, whether you know they are there, and they influence what they should do. . . . They do not analyze you as an individual. . . . It's really aggravating but I deal with it and I do what I can. Yeah! But not as a Black person because Black person can't be smart!

If UT addressed the negative stereotypes head-on, I think that would do wonders. As mentioned before, I try to teach whenever I can, but I am only one person. If the institution were to do something I think it would help. As far as learning what to do when you get into college, I think UT does a good job, all of the staff and counselors help as far as classes and stuff.

#### *Analysis for Research Question 4*

The overall perception of institutional support was consistent throughout these seven interviews. While most of the participants agreed that the institution (in this case The University of Texas at Austin) provided satisfactory programs and/or facilities targeted toward diversification and matriculation into higher education, it was inferred by the researcher that the institution did not adequately address issues of environmental change or campus climate. Damian stated that he recognized the efforts put forth by the university but noted the need for change in the mindsets of many people on campus. Other participants expressed feelings of being unjustly portrayed in the campus media.

This also infers a relationship between research questions 1 and 4. If society's perception, in this instance The University of Texas at Austin's campus culture, of Black males is negative, then there is a possibility that this deficit mentality will affect Black males on campus in an adverse manner, both socially and academically.

Furthermore, as noted in the literature review, Tatum (1997) posited a direct relationship between negative stereotypes and academic performance. Although the notion of negative stereotyping influencing academic performance is reasonable, these seven young men had overcome this potentially devastating perception, chiefly by understanding the perceptions and accepting them as mistaken, rather than accepting them as fact.

The University appears to see the creation of programs for students of color as adequate student support, while students of color are looking to the institution for a more systemic approach of support in the form of testing, tutoring, mentoring, and social integration to the campus culture, ultimately leading to more complete interaction with faculty and students. It is a challenge for a population to become integrated in a society if that society has deemed them and their ideas, values, and norms as unimportant.

Andrew did not place responsibility for the perceptions (and self-perceptions) of African American male students entirely on the university. Instead, he placed responsibility first on the Black community in general and second on the individual Black male in particular. He commented that the issue of deficit stereotyping—and its eventual resolution—is a responsibility shared by everyone.

#### *Cross-Case Analysis*

It became evident that there was a direct relationship between the first two research questions, concerning societal dissonance and self-efficacy. When the participants were asked about their self-efficacy, several responded in a way to imply

that, although their self-efficacy was high, it could be affected by societal dissonance (negative stereotyping). One participant stated, "While I believe in myself, I think the way you feel about yourself can be influenced by others." Although others did not directly state that dissonance was an insurmountable obstacle, they mentioned it as a possible barrier, and they noted that they understood why other Black males would be negatively affected by it. One could also make a case for a relationship between questions 2 and 3 (self-efficacy and African American male mentorship, respectively). Although it was found that African American male mentorship had no direct influence on successful matriculation to college by Black males, the impact that the support systems, which were found to be more effective than the singular mentorship relationships, had more to do with the confidence that these young men had in themselves and their academic abilities. A relationship between research questions 1 and 4, concerning societal dissonance and institutional support, was also noted. It was presumed that, if society's perception (in this instance reflected by The University of Texas at Austin's campus culture) of Black males is negative, then there is a possibility that this deficit mentality will affect Black males on campus in an adverse manner, both socially and academically.

Table 6 summarizes the linkages between research questions. The arrows in the table indicate the direction of change in impacts on a particular research question: An arrow pointing up indicates that the research question is impacted positively, and an arrow pointing down indicates that the research question is influenced negatively.

#### *Critical Race Theory and the Research Questions*

The findings in this study were consistent with the underlining premise of CRT. The notions of the social construction of race and discrimination were present throughout the responses by the participants. It is important to review here the theory in

Table 6

*Linkages Between Research Questions (RQ) Resulting From Cross-Case Analysis*

Research question and topic	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4
1 Societal dissonance		↓	↑	↓
2 Self-efficacy			↑	
3 African American male mentorship				
4 Institutional support				

*Note.* An arrow pointing up indicates that the research question is influence positively, and an arrow pointing down indicates that the research question is influenced negatively.

which this study is framed. Scheurich and Young (1997) asserted that the current scope of epistemologies “arises out of the social history and culture of the dominant race . . . logically reflecting and reinforcing that social history and that racial group, while excluding the epistemologies of other races and cultures” (p. 11). The critical result of epistemological racism creates adverse consequences for racial and cultural groups that have different epistemologies, idealisms, and ontologies. As a consequence, racial and cultural groups that are not among the dominant culture are confronted with epistemological problems.

*CRT and Research Question 1*

Consistent with CRT, the participants expressed feelings of isolation and low academic expectations of them held by their peers and instructors. Several of the participants directly stated that negative pressures and stereotypes of societal dissonance would affect a Black male’s academic matriculation into college in an adverse way. Many participants stated that they had to prove themselves academically in order to be

accepted by peers. This is consistent with CRT principles, as some people attribute their social status in society as based on the racial category to which they belong (the dominant race usually being White; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Many African American males feel that they have to prove themselves through myriad achievements (academic, social, or athletic) in order to obtain the same level of respect as that received by White peers. Unfortunately, the act of proving themselves worthy is an act that they will be forced to perform throughout life.

### *CRT and Research Question 2*

Feelings of isolation, low academic expectations, and negative stereotyping can influence a person in an adverse way. Self-efficacy is important when a person is confronted with the aforementioned barriers to academic success. As Moore (2001, as cited in Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 35) stated,

These oppressive barriers are interpreted as messages of intellectual incompetence, which at times have negative effects on the academic identity and success of African American male students. Success for African American males has less to do with academic capability and more to do with motivation, self-efficacy, commitment, and follow-through, which ultimately leads to success.

Fortunately, these seven young men have found ways to overcome these barriers.

Unfortunately, many young Black male students do not discover how to overcome these barriers.

### *CRT and Research Question 3*

Although the singular African American male mentor relationship reported in this study did not have much of an influence on academic success nor on matriculation by Black males as had been anticipated, it was revealed that a male mentorship relationship would seem to have more impact if the mentor were of the same race as the student. The isolation that Black males experience at predominantly White institutions is reinforced by the absence of African American male faculty/mentors. Based on the



responses from these study participants, it can be assumed that the participants experienced difficulty in forming relationships with White faculty. The participants' reported reservations about admitting difficulties to White faculty because of the fear of being perceived as academically underprepared for college may also be an indication that they may feel that they do not belong. Participants stated that they found it easier to approach African American faculty because of their shared life experiences. Hiring more African American faculty was viewed by all participants as critical. Because of the low African American enrollment on the University of Texas at Austin campus and the low number of African American faculty members, Black males often find themselves lacking formal and informal support groups. The participants seemed to counter this absence of support by creating peer support groups on their own. The participants described how they depended on their peers for support both socially and academically. One could postulate that the difficulty in forming relationships with White peers may have been one of the reasons for creating a peer-to-peer support system; the other may have been that such a system was considered essential to their survival.

#### *CRT and Research Question 4*

The subtle and not-so-subtle forms of stereotyping that Black students experience at a predominantly White institution makes race the major determining factor in social interaction that often leads African American male students to feel academically inferior and alienated. When viewed through the lens of the student, negative perspectives of support by the institution for African American males is evident. The University appears to see funding programs for students as adequate support for students of color, while those students of color are looking to the institution for systemic support in the form of testing, tutoring, mentoring, and social integration to the campus cultural that ultimately leads to interaction with faculty and students. It is a challenge for a population to

become integrated in a society if that society has deemed them and their idea, values, and norms to be unimportant.

This brings up the question, “Could what the participants are experiencing be considered to be institutional racism?” Institutional discrimination is discrimination that occurs simply because the rules and expectations were set when a privileged group was in control. Those not belonging to the privileged group find that they are harmed by the rules and expectations; however, the discrimination is “not personal” in the sense that no person is discriminating against them individually. Rather, the discrimination of the past simply led to rules that now do the same discriminating, but without a perpetrator (Oliver, 1999, p. 81). Although the participants reported feeling pressure and negative stereotyping from their peers and possibly low academic expectations from their instructors, they did not report that anyone on campus had assaulted them outright, made derogatory statements intentionally, or denigrated them to their face. Another possible explanation for the reluctance of Black male students to accept White mentors and feel comfortable in confiding their insecurities is the notion that, after years of negative interactions throughout the educational pipeline, they may fear living up to the self-fulfilling prophecy or, as Steele and Aronson (1995) posited, acting out that stereotype. Lower expectations of academic performance and ability also surfaced as obstacles to communicating with White faculty. The fact that these students did not necessarily accept these assumptions and stereotypes does not mean that they were entirely free from their influence. Although all of the participants had high levels of self-efficacy, one admitted having had feelings of academic incompetence since entering the University. However, he also expressed that these feelings were exacerbated by perceptions of incompetence from White faculty and his peers.

### **Additional Findings**

Although it was not a formal research question guiding the study, an additional question arose in the course of the interviews conducted for this research: *Does the responsibility of acclimating African American males into the higher education culture fall on the Black community or the institution of higher education?* The insightful responses to this question acknowledged that (a) the institution and faculty were making efforts to acclimate African American males to the campus, (b) the responsibility should be shared by the institution and the individual student, and (c) the ultimate responsibility falls mostly on the student.

Given that The University of Texas at Austin is a predominantly White institution and that African Americans represent only 4% of the student body, this researcher was interested by the participants' perceptions of African Americans on campus. When the participants were asked whether they considered themselves to be representative of all African American students at the university, most responded that they felt the pressure of representing the Black population on campus.

When you are in the class and you are the only Black student there, you are a representation of the Black race. In addition, for many people you are the only Black person that they interact with or may see. I think the Black community and a lot of the Black males here are perceived as being lazy, and to an extent we are. I think it ties back to the stereotypes of Black males and the Black community in general. It [seems] so much easier to sell drugs or to rap or to play basketball and be successful than it's actually to put your face in a book and work hard for 4 years in order to achieve that same goal. (Andrew)

Some participants described some African American males on campus as acting in a certain way that might be viewed negatively by others as representative of all of their race.

It's embarrassing . . . I'm not the only Black person on a predominantly White campus, but it's a lot of pressure to try and fight those stereotypes. It's frustrating when you have peers who don't care, who are just themselves, you know.

Colin talked about the choices that people make in terms of the way they represent themselves (and ultimately the Black community).

I come from a neighborhood that is not great. People see me and hear the way I talk and I grew up hearing everybody talk White all my life, all that stuff. People have choices. Me and my brother, we grew up in this bad neighborhood, but my mom always made sure we had everything we wanted, I mean everything we needed (some of it we wanted).

A common theme was that these negative perceptions held by others served many African American male students as positive motivators to represent their race in the most positive light: "I have set myself to higher standards. . . . I try to do the best that I can possibly do so that they aren't surprised." One participant explained his motivation to succeed in breaking those stereotypes.

That's why I put so much pressure on myself. That's why I spend so much time in the library trying to compete with the other cultures because I know that they are doing the same amount of work that I am doing and that they are trying to compete with me in the same amount of jobs that I'm trying to compete to get later on in life. . . . I'm here studying, so that I can help to break the stereotype.

Another participant remarked,

I don't want the Black community to continue to be perceived as being lazy, so that kind of motivates me on a daily basis to make sure that I am doing what I am supposed to be doing. I do not need to achieve just for my personal success, but also for the success of the Black community.

Interviews with these seven intelligent, inspiring young men engendered in the researcher a renewed sense of being. They were examples of what hard work, determination, and a strong belief in oneself can do to move successfully along the barrier-filled path of success. Throughout all seven interviews, the participants identified the barriers to academic success as feelings of racism, isolation, and negative stereotyping on campus, all of which usually lead to low self-esteem, poor academic performance, and behavioral problems (Thomas, 1989) for African American males.

A common theme from the interviews with these young men was that African American males could be academically successful without adult Black males playing a

major role in their tutelage. The interviews conducted in this study indicated that, with solid overall support systems, Black males could achieve high levels of success, both personally and academically.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Overview of the Study**

Overall, this study focused on the perceived influence of self-efficacy, male mentorship, and institutional support on the academic achievement of African American males at a predominantly White institution. The previous chapters include the introduction, statement of problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, literature review, methodology and procedures used to assist in addressing the four research questions, and a summary of the data collected via the interviews of seven African American male students in a predominantly White institution of higher education. This chapter presents a summary of the findings, conclusions drawn from the results, and a discussion of the implications of the results. Recommendations for further studies are presented.

As have previous studies conducted at other institutions of higher education (Driggers, 2007; Harper, 2003), this study found that African American males with a strong support system were more likely than those without a strong support system to succeed at predominantly White institutions.

Upon close review of the data and analysis of what made the seven young men participating in this study successful at The University of Texas at Austin, one issue continued to surface: It became evident that disadvantaged students' low academic performance has many mutually reinforcing causes. It also became evident that most of those disadvantages or barriers could be effectively addressed through a strong support system and a strong belief in oneself and one's academic abilities. Originally, this researcher had approached the study with the intent of identifying which of three factors

had a perceived influence on academic success: self-efficacy, African American male mentorship, and institutional support. After some off-the-record conversations with African American male colleagues and conducting an online survey with members of the sampling population (who did not participate in interviews), it became apparent that a fourth variable was needed to ensure that the study unearthed all relevant themes, barriers, and possible solutions. That fourth variable was societal dissonance.

Almost 200 years after slavery ended, the participants in this study expressed feelings of detachment from peers and from society. Some expressed acute awareness that they were always being watched or judged as members of their ethnic group. Colin described it as being “under a microscope.” Jesse stated,

I guess I always like to portray an image of being a smart African American guy in the class. I always have to keep that image; I always have to make sure I think of what my thoughts are going to be before I say them.

That statement, and many others like it, translated into the burden of representing the entire African American race. Again, this alludes to Thernstrom and Thernstrom’s (2003) notion that African American males experience unbridled subtle and unsubtle racism throughout their lives.

Although most of the participants generally had high level of self-efficacy, that self-confidence was not always as high in relation to academics. Most of the participants were confident in their academic abilities based on their high school experience (for some of them in an all-African American high school); however, upon entering the University, that confidence fell somewhat short as they competed against White counterparts. From this arose the pressure to do well in all endeavors, appear as intelligent, and represent the African American race. Given that the United States is one of the most unequal societies in the industrialized world, it would be unrealistic to expect students’ academic performance to be equal when other factors are not equal. Every

industrialized society has achievement gaps. Achievement gaps in the United States are greater due to its economic system being more unequal.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

The following paragraphs are summaries of relevant sections of Chapter IV.

#### *Research Question 1*

Research question 1 asked, *What is the perceived influence of societal dissonance on the African American male's academic success?*

1. There was a direct relationship between societal dissonance and these African American males' academic performance and successful matriculation into college.

2. This group of young men addressed the issue of negative stereotypes, feelings of isolation, and low academic expectations by performing well in the classroom.

3. Although these Black males were aware of the deficit perception of them and they combated the negativity by doing well in the classroom, several stated that the negative perceptions affect them and hurts them emotionally.

4. These Black males addressed deficit stereotyping by ensuring that their personal behavior did not match that of the stereotypical young Black male.

5. These findings are consistent with research reported by Steele and Aronson (1995) postulating that, when a person's social identity is attached to a negative stereotype, that person will tend to underperform in a manner consistent with the stereotype.

The findings from this study are consistent with the findings reported in the reviewed literature. According to the participants in the present study, perception of African American males is usually discussed from a deficit perspective. Many African American males with varied backgrounds, including doctors, lawyers, social workers, teachers, janitors, and construction workers, are confronted with stereotypes every day.



Bill Cosby once stated, “If a White man falls off a chair drunk, it’s just a drunk. If a Negro does, it’s the whole damn Negro race.” While some may find this statement a little far fetched, many African American males would agree wholeheartedly, as validated by the participants in this study.

### *Research Question 2*

Research question 2 asked, *What is the perceived influence of self-efficacy on the African American male’s academic success?*

1. The level of self-efficacy observed in the seven young men interviewed in this study was extremely high

2. The researcher found the young men to have a strong belief not only in themselves but also in their academic abilities, although at times their belief in their academic abilities came into question.

3. Generally, these young men’s self-efficacy appeared to have been shaped through interactions with their support systems, particularly family, friends, and teachers.

4. The findings are consistent with research reported by Lee (2000), who contended that it is possible to educate all children, including Black males, at high levels.

5. There was a direct positive relationship between self-efficacy and GPA.

6. Based on comments made during the interviews, it can be concluded that participants who had structured goals tended to have a higher level of self-efficacy.

7. The findings in this chapter are consistent with research reported by Moore (2001, as cited in Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 35): “What separate African American male students from their Caucasian counterparts are the unmeasurable burdens of racism, discrimination, and negative stereotypes.”

8. The oppressive barriers reported in this study were interpreted as messages of intellectual incompetence, which at times have negative effects on the academic identity and success of African American male students. “Success for African American males has less to do with academic capability and more to do with motivation, self-efficacy, commitment, and follow-through, which ultimately leads to success” (Moore, 2001, as cited in Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 36).

The researcher found these young men to have a strong belief not only in themselves but also in their academic abilities, although at times the belief in their academic abilities came into question. There was a perceived direct positive relationship between self-efficacy and GPA. Also, it seemed that the participants with structured goals tended to have higher levels of self-efficacy.

### *Research Question 3*

Research question 3 asked, *What is the perceived influence of African American male mentorship on the African American male’s academic success?*

1. African American male mentorship did not have a high impact on the success of these seven young men.

2. A common theme from the interviews with these young men was that African American males could be successful without adult Black males playing a major role in their tutelage.

3. The interviews conducted in this study indicated that, with a solid overall support system, Black males can achieve success both personally and academically.

4. Upon the realization that Black male mentorship does not play a significant role in achievement for some African American men, the focus of the question shifts from the perceived influence and impact of African American male mentorship on

academic success and matriculation to the general lack of African American male mentors, particularly on the campuses of institutions of higher education.

5. Of the seven young men interviewed, only four had been raised with a male figure in their lives. Of those four, only two reported that their fathers had played a pivotal role in their life in general and in their academic success by challenging them academically. The other two participants with male figures in their lives considered that they had been successful without the influence of a male role model.

6. Although it might be assumed that the other four participants, raised in single-parent households, could have been influenced negatively by the lack of an African American male role model, the responses from the participants without an African American male role model did not support that assumption.

7. The participants who were raised in single-parent households seemed to have others who served as mentors in support systems that did not include a male role model.

8. It was agreed by the participants that, although it is not necessary that mentors on campus or in life be of the same race as the mentee, it is helpful for the mentor to understand “where the mentee is coming from.” This would indicate that a match of race between mentor and mentee could be an advantage.

9. Overall, whether these African American males were utilizing a formal or informal support system, the perceived support seemed to have a significant influence on their ability to enter and continue in college.

10. All but one of the participants stated that they were satisfied with their support systems, which they described as having a significant influence on their academic performance.

11. The findings in this study were not consistent with research reviewed in Chapter II. While Foster and Peele (1999) discussed factors that proved effective in the

success of Black males in education, one being the presence of African American male teachers, this study did not support but validated the notion of the positive influence of support systems in general.

Several participants mentioned programs on campus that had been particularly helpful upon their arrival to campus. One remarked, “I would love to see [organizations such as SAAB] grow more and influence more people.” The participants stated that the programs that discussed stereotypes and racial issues openly and candidly were the most effective. However, some participants were less than enthusiastic about the institution’s motivations for offering specialized services for the African American male student. A common theme from the interviews with these young men was that African American males can be academically successful without adult Black males playing a major role in their tutelage. The interviews conducted in this study indicated that, with a solid overall support system, Black males can achieve high levels of success at high levels, both personally and academically.

#### *Research Question 4*

Research question 4 asked, *What is the perceived influence of institutional support on the African American male’s academic success?*

1. The overall perception of institutional support was consistent throughout these seven interviews. While most of the participants agreed that the institution (in this case The University of Texas at Austin) provided satisfactory programs and/or facilities targeted toward diversification and matriculation into higher education, it was implied that the institution did not adequately address issues of environmental change or campus climate.

2. Many of the participants discussed programs that targeted diversity issues during orientation activities. Several also mentioned groups on campus that provided an

outlet to interact with a variety of people, as well as groups that specifically provided an opportunity to identify with other African American men.

3. While acknowledging the value of these groups, most of the participants commented that most of the resistance that they had encountered on campus came in the form of preconceptions held by individuals on campus, not the University in general.

4. Some participants expressed feelings of being unjustly portrayed in the campus media. This implies a relationship between research questions 1 and 4. If society's perception (in this instance The University of Texas at Austin campus culture), of Black males is negative, then there is a possibility that this deficit mentality will affect Black males on campus in an adverse manner, both socially and academically.

There was acknowledgment by the participants that the study institution (The University of Texas at Austin) and its faculty were making efforts to acclimate African American males to the campus, although most considered these efforts to fall short of complete. The participants remarked that the responsibility for changing negative perceptions should be shared by the institution and the individual student, with ultimate responsibility falling mostly on the student.

#### *Cross-Case Analysis*

It became evident that there was a direct relationship between some of the research questions. Below is a summary of the inferred influences between research questions.

1. The first two research questions, concerning societal dissonance and self-efficacy, were correlated. When the participants were asked about their self-efficacy, several responded in a way to imply that, although their self-efficacy was high, it could be affected by societal dissonance (negative stereotyping).

2. A relationship between research questions 2 and 3 (self-efficacy and African American male mentorship) was inferred. Although it was found that African American male mentorship had no direct influence on the successful matriculation of these Black males in college, the impact that the support systems, which were found to be more effective than the singular mentorship relationships, had more to do with the confidence that these seven young men had in themselves and their academic abilities.

3. A relationship between research questions 1 and 4 (societal dissonance and institutional support) was noted. It was presumed that, if society's perception (in this instance The University of Texas at Austin campus culture) of Black males is negative, then there is a possibility that this deficit mentality will affect Black males on campus in an adverse manner, both socially and academically.

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation was intended to add to the body of research and literature currently addressing issues of societal dissonance, low self-efficacy, lack of an African American male influence, and institutional support concerning African American males and their troubled journey throughout the educational pipeline. This section summarizes the most significant findings across all four research questions: 1. There was a direct relationship between societal dissonance and academic performance and successful matriculation into college among these African American male students; 2. This group of young men addressed the issue of negative stereotypes, feelings of isolation, and low academic expectations by performing well in the classroom; 3. The findings were consistent with research reported by Steele and Aronson (1995) postulating that, when a person's social identity is attached to a negative stereotype, that person will tend to underperform in a manner consistent with the stereotype; 4. The researcher found the young men to have a strong belief not only in themselves but also in their academic

abilities, although at times their belief in their academic abilities came into question; 5. Generally, the young men's self-efficacy appeared to have been shaped through interactions with their support systems, particularly family, friends, and teachers; 6. These findings are consistent with research reported by Lee (2000) that it is possible to educate all children, including Black males, at high levels; 7. Based on several comments made during the interviews, it seemed that the participants who had structured goals tended to have a higher level of self-efficacy; 8. The oppressive barriers identified by the participants were interpreted as messages of intellectual incompetence, which at times have negative effects on the academic identity and success of African American male students. "Success for African American males has less to do with academic capability and more to do with motivation, self-efficacy, commitment, and follow-through, which ultimately leads to success" (Moore, 2001, as cited in Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 36); 9. African American male mentorship did not have a high impact on the success of these seven young men; 10. A common theme from the interviews with these young men was that African American males could be successful without adult Black males playing a major role in their tutelage; 11. Of the seven young men interviewed, only four had been raised with a male figure in their lives. Of those four, only two reported that their fathers had played a pivotal role in their lives in general and their academic success in particular by challenging them academically. The other two participants with male figures in their lives considered that they had been successful without the influence of a male role model; 12. Although it might be assumed that the other four participants, raised in single-parent households, had been influenced negatively by the lack of an African American male role model, the responses from the participants without an African American male role model did not support that assumption; 13. The participants who were raised in single-parent households seemed to

have other persons who served as mentors in support systems that did not include a male role model; 14. Although it is not necessary that mentors on campus or in life be of the same race as the mentee, it is helpful for the mentor to understand “where the mentee is coming from.” This would indicate that a match of race between mentor and mentee could be an advantage; 15. Overall, whether these African American males were utilizing a formal or informal support system, the perceived support seemed to have a significant influence on their ability to enter and continue in college; 16. The findings in this study were not consistent with research reported by Foster and Peele (1999), who discussed factors that proved effective in the success of Black males in education, one being the presence of African American male teachers. While this study did not disprove that notion, it validated the notion of the positive influence of support systems; 17. The overall perception of institutional support was consistent throughout these seven interviews. While most of the participants agreed that the institution (in this case The University of Texas at Austin) provided satisfactory programs and/or facilities targeted toward diversification and matriculation into higher education, it was noted that the institution did not adequately address issues of environmental change or campus climate often leaving the students of color, more specifically Black males, feeling left out, or not as a part of the institution’s community; this is consistent with the notion of Bonner and Evan’s (2004) findings that many African Americans attending school at PWI’s that find themselves in a hostile environment tend to retreat into enclaves comprised of like-minded and like-complexioned peers. Although these cohorts provide the students with a homogeneous discourse community, they are often relegated to experiencing college life from the periphery. This action often causes these communities to be viewed as “particularistic”, residing beyond the mainstream workings of the broader campus-based community, further isolating them from the institution’s community; 18. Some



participants expressed feelings of being unjustly portrayed in the campus media. This implies a relationship between research questions 1 and 4. If society's perception (in this instance The University of Texas at Austin campus culture) of Black males is negative, then there is a possibility that this deficit mentality will affect Black males on campus in an adverse manner, both socially and academically.

The most important findings of the study related to the extent to which the support systems had a positive influence on successful matriculation of African American males into a predominantly White institution. Emulation on the campus of support systems found in the home and community would greatly enhance matriculation of African American males into higher education at predominantly White institutions. The discovery of crossover and linkages among the four research questions indicates that issues confronting African American males students must be addressed through a systemic approach. A systemic approach promotes analysis and action across the whole of a system rather than just one part of it. A systemic approach identifies and influences the key interrelationships that affect both short-term and long-term behaviors. Looking for the main sources of resistance to change (e.g., campus climate) rather than focusing on overcoming resistance and barriers shifts the focus to long-term analysis to identify both the subtle and major issues concerning change that over time can have powerful implications. These seven young men validated Lee's (2000) notions that it is possible to educate all children, including Black males, at high levels.

### **Implications for Practice**

Academicians in Texas frequently speak of "Closing the Gap," a phrase usually associated with raising test scores and increasing overall academic performance by minority students and expanding the number of minority students enrolled in higher education. However, there has been a problem in their approach to "closing the gap" in

that the approach to solutions has not been systemic. A systemic approach would include a model combining better schools with community participation and greater social and economic equality.

Whereas educators cannot directly improve social conditions outside the classroom, they can do much to improve social conditions within the classroom. Administrators and instructors must develop insight into the socioeconomic and personal challenges faced by the Black males whom they teach. In the classroom, teachers should focus on increasing the academic achievement of *all* of their students, holding Black males accountable to the same academic rigor and standards as that required of other students. This study validated feelings of isolation that African American males have reported in other studies (e.g., Driggers, 2007). This study also validated negative perceptions and stereotypes that African American males feel not only in the classroom, but also in society. Instructors should be outspoken about gaining support from the administration without fear of being accused of “making excuses” and not performing their duties.

Outside the classroom and in the community and society, there are difficult choices to be made to ensure academic and life-long success for the African American male. Policy makers should not be choosing between health care and housing support on the one hand and quality early childhood programs or greater economic security on the other. Put simply, all of these are vital in a society that is committed to an idea of a greater equality. The nation must address the conditions under which too many young Black men and boys are growing up in to ensure that they have the academic tools to participate successfully in the economic, social, and cultural mainstream. This can happen when more Black males have the skills and knowledge to get good, high-paying

jobs, to actively participate in democracy, and to be well-educated parents who have high expectations for the next generation. The first step is closing the achievement gap.

One of the major challenges to closing the achievement gap for young Black males is the prevalent culture of low expectations for these students. Such expectations have led to provision of fewer factors that promote academic success, such as good teachers, rich curriculum, challenging course work, and engaging classroom assignments.

Matriculation into college will not happen for African Americans males if aggressive measures are not implemented. The strategies of the past, the “usual suspects,” such as smaller classes, additional money without tested results, higher standardized testing without proper preparation, teacher accountability without proper training for the teachers being held accountable (teacher sensitivity training), and many more overnight strategies that seem to simply mask the problem instead of rectifying it, will not be sufficient. One such “quick fix” has been the failed Top 10% Rule, a Texas statute aimed at increasing diversity in higher education. The Top 10% Rule states that students in the top 10% of their graduating high school class are eligible for automatic admission to any public university in Texas. Although this statute has increased the numbers of African Americans and Latinos in higher education institutions, it is only a small fix to a much larger issue. It does not solve the deeply engrained issues in today’s problematic educational environment.

A challenge facing administrators of higher education is equitable, fair access into the higher education system. The Spellings Report has received mixed reviews. Secretary of Education Spellings has made little more than passing reference to the recommendation in the commission’s report to increase financial aid on a need-based system, specifically by increasing the average Pell Grant over 5 years so that it covers

70% of the average in-state tuition at public 4-year colleges, as opposed to the current 44% (Inside Higher Education, 2008). Providing higher levels of financial support for African American males entering higher education may not speak to the issue of lack of academic preparation, but it does open the college doors to those young Black males who are academically prepared.

The Spellings Report is basically a higher education version of the No Child Left Behind Act, and the results will more than likely turn out to be something similar to what is occurring in K-12. As Spellings has noted, many students graduate from high school without the skills to do well in college or in the work place and urged that efforts be made to assure that students graduate “on time.” This simplistic solution frequently results in students who graduated “on time” but with serious deficiencies in reading, writing, and mathematics skills, forcing colleges and universities to do what K-12 failed to do. This policy can have particularly serious consequences for African American males.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Many educators seem to find it easier to defame successful schools than do the hard work of identifying and emulating best practices. Learning from leaders and other institutions that have achieved success is often the best way to improve practice in any endeavor. This section reviews areas in which academic administrators and policy makers could benefit from learning new ideas.

#### *Societal Dissonance*

Myriad issues emerged from this study. The participants all expressed feelings of isolation and negative stereotypes in both the classroom and in life. Faculty members at institutions of higher education can challenge the deficit perspective and stereotypes of Black males in their classrooms, thus helping to address the issue of societal dissonance

concerning Black males. Festinger (1957) identified three ways to eliminate dissonance: (a) reduce the importance of the dissonant beliefs, (b) add consonant beliefs that outweigh the dissonant beliefs, and (c) change dissonant beliefs so they are no longer inconsistent. These goals can be achieved by integrating minority and racism-related content into the curriculum; for example, rather than concentrating on “African American month,” the faculty could integrate into the curriculum an ongoing program that identifies the contributions, feelings, and lifestyles of minorities

Aronson (1968) offered strategies for reducing dissonance on an individual level. Given the similarities between rectifying individual and societal misconceptions and inconsistencies, these strategies apply to societal dissonance as well: (a) changing behavior to match one’s attitude, (b) changing attitude to match one’s behavior, and (c) cognitively minimizing the degree of inconsistency or its importance. Participants in this study reported that non-Black students saw the Black students as intellectually inferior. Faculty can address this issue by interacting with all students at the same level, by treating all students the same way, and by holding all students to the same standards. Such practices acknowledge Black students as equals while at the same time not spotlighting anyone or openly showing emotion that could be misconstrued as favoritism. The first two strategies mentioned will not only acknowledge the contributions of other cultures but will relieve pressures that many of the participants described related to having to prove how smart they are in order to be accepted.

The faculty member who senses tension or isolation within the classroom can give those on the receiving end an opportunity to express their feelings and views. The opportunity may be in the form of forums, workshops, or general information sessions. Many of the participants in this study stated that, if an opportunity were presented, they would use it to educate those who are not familiar with other cultures.

Aronson (1968) suggested that reducing dissonance might occur by acquiring new information that is consistent with attitudes or actions that seem inconsistent at first. Faculty can challenge stereotyped perceptions of the Black male through their interactions in the classroom. Instructors can minimize the importance of a negative attitude or behavior. This can be done by focusing on the positive aspects of African American culture instead of targeting negative aspects. Festinger (1957) stated that minimizing the emphasis on differences or acknowledging the differences from a positive aspect can reduce dissonant beliefs.

### *Self-Efficacy*

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to achieve specified goals. By means of the self-system, individuals exercise control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Self-efficacy beliefs are most influential arbiters of human activity (Bandura, 1997). Institutions play a key role in reinforcing self-efficacy. The participants in this study showed very high levels of self-efficacy, wanting to be challenged, wanting to be successful, and wanting to be treated like everyone else on an equal playing field and to be held to the same standards as everyone else in the class. Faculty, administrators, and staff must hold all students to the same standards and expect all students to succeed.

Most of the participants expressed great pride in their GPA. The researcher concluded that there was a direct positive relationship between GPA and self-efficacy. Faculty could highlight the success of students who are doing well in their classes.

Wayne revealed that, in selecting teams for projects in some of his classes, Black people were usually the last students selected or were not selected at all. Faculty or administrators could address this issue by selecting the teams, taking away from students the potential power to discriminate.

Saviour commented that being Black is perceived by some in a negative connotation, equating being Black to being unintelligent. Carey and Forsyth (2007) suggested teaching strategies that could assist administration and faculty efforts in reaching out to young Black males in the classroom. They stated that helping students to understand differences among the constructs of related social-cognitive theories, such as self-efficacy, outcome expectancies, behavioral intentions, self-esteem, and optimism, can provide a better understanding of the students' issues. This problem could also be addressed in the same way as the problem of negative stereotyping was addressed, by integrating minority and racism-related content into the curriculum. Such a strategy will not only acknowledge the contributions of other cultures, but will relieve some of the pressures that many of the participants described about having to prove that they are "smart" in order to be accepted.

### *Mentoring*

Faculty mentorship is important for young Black males. Administrative support of mentorship programs within an institution of higher education is necessary for the success of such programs. Many of the participants gave credit to the University for providing a range of programs aimed at their acceptance on campus. However, it is interesting that none of the participants mentioned a faculty-student mentorship program as a part of those services. In fact, Jesse stated that he wished he would have met a person like the researcher, who could have assisted him in his freshman and sophomore years on campus. "If someone could have just said, 'Jesse, take your time, just take 12 hours in your freshman year and then extend it up to 15 hours in your sophomore year and 15 hours as your junior year.'" Although many institutions of higher education have guidance counselors to assist with course scheduling and other academic issues, students

often feel more comfortable in discussing more personal or individual academic problems with people with whom they can build rapport.

The participants cited a couple of effective characteristics of mentors or aspects of support systems that were consistent with those reported in the literature as effective in a mentoring program: (a) formal and informal support groups, and (b) matching by racing in mentoring programs. Faison (1995) cited several criteria for mentoring programs: (a) the functions of mentors that meet the needs of African American undergraduate students, depending on the students' stage of collegiate career; (b) the most critical commodities that mentees identify needing from their mentors; (c) how the personal mentoring relationship of mentors and mentees impacts the degree and manner in which African American undergraduate students succeed in school; (d) whether African American mentees choose university mentors by attending to their personal characteristics more than activity setting and positional characteristics; (e) whether cultural and interactional differences previously thought to be inhibitors to the formation of successful mentoring relationships between African American students and their university professors on predominantly White campuses are evident among the participants. Several study participants expressed a need for more African American male mentorship, not only on campus but in outside life as well. One participant stated that, if some of his boyhood friends had had a male role model in their lives, they might not be in prison today.

LaVant et al. (1987) offered another perspective on effective mentoring criteria. Based on the observations of the faculty mentoring programs offered at several postsecondary institutions, they asserted that, in order to have an effective mentoring program that promotes and enhances retention, academic achievement, and leadership development in African American men, several factors must be considered. First, the



executive leadership within the institution must be genuinely committed to the concept of a formal mentoring program. Second, resources (human and financial) must be allocated for support of the program. Third, a university committee should be established to identify African American male students, upon admission, who might be potential program participants or mentees. Fourth, energetic, compassionate, and dedicated individuals from all fields of expertise and all levels within the university must be selected as mentors. This perspective is consistent with the responses given by participants in the present study.

Mentors can have significant influence all students. One study participant stated that he had chosen his major based on a conversation with a high school teacher. He stated that the teacher had shown interest in him and had complimented him on a paper. The teacher stated that the student should consider engineering because it seemed he had “a head for numbers.” Four years later this young man was a senior engineer major holding a 3.11 GPA. The power of mentoring is truly something special, should be regarded as such, and should be utilized more in the culture of higher education concerning African American males.

LaVant et al. (1987) contended that in effective mentoring programs the program coordinator or director should work closely with the university’s admissions office and registrar to obtain information related to potential and current program participants. A couple of the participants stated that they were serving as peer mentors and commented that identifying potential students at registration could be an effective method of “scouting” peer mentors. This was based on the observation that students tend to relate to students of the same age and experiences. They asserted that a training program must be developed for faculty and staff who are selected to serve in the program. For initial and continued success of the program, external (local) community support for the

program must be established by marketing the program to community leaders, business affiliates, and educators. Based on reports by several participants that they attributed their academic success to a variety of people in their lives who had provided a support system, it is reasonable to involve community and business people to serve as mentors and role models. Finally, an effective mentoring program should contain an evaluation component to assist with modifications and improvements. The researchers stressed that an unbiased assessment and evaluation of all phases of the program must be an ongoing process, since redesign can be expected and a program may be ignored or eliminated for lack of objective documentation regarding its effectiveness.

#### *Institutional Support*

Institutional and personal racism challenge African American males who are considering or are participating in higher education. While some believe that racism is dead, this is far from true. Racism is alive and well on college and university campuses. However, it is not politically correct to be considered a racist and therefore racist attitudes and behaviors tend to be well hidden. Likewise, on most predominantly White university campuses, African American males are not in positions of power. The lack of positive African American role models is a serious problem. Participants in this study agreed that the campus climate in general was not inviting, or even accepting, of minority students. Thus, racism, favoritism, and policies and practices of exclusion still have a negative impact on African American males on college and university campuses.

Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) contended that institutions are having trouble retaining African American males due to unbridled subtle and unsubtle racism and an unchecked campus climate. One of the greatest challenges facing colleges and universities in Texas involves creating and maintaining a campus community that reflects the diversity of the state. The state of Texas has recognized failure to make

aggressive efforts to develop such a campus community would result in magnification of the state's historic problems of racial divide and deprivation of future generations of the knowledge of the significant contributions that can be made by people of color to all professions and occupations.

The nation's colleges, universities, and higher education organizations have endorsed the concept that racial and ethnic diversity should be only one factor among many considered in admissions and hiring in order to provide a quality education for all students. Test scores, essay writing results, and racial identity should all be used as qualifiers in gaining entrance into college. A strong educational foundation and a hard work ethic should be rewarded in evaluation for entrance into college, but it should not be the sole criterion, since not all students have the same educational background.

Although claims are made that this is an egalitarian society, such claims are simply not true. Despite what the Constitution says, all men are not created equal; some are born into a lower socioeconomic situation, resulting in an unequal educational background. It is assumed that all have the same rights to equal liberties; again, this is not so. By no means is it suggested that a college or university admit anyone based solely on the color of his or her skin; however, race should be considered. Knefelkamp (University of Michigan, 1998, ¶ 2) asserted, "In order for higher education to be more effective, we must have an accurate reflection of society represented within higher education." Until that happens, higher education will never truly represent the face, thoughts, and idealisms of a just society.

Institutional support may take many forms. Sedlacek (1983) identified eight concepts pertaining to motivation and persistence that he contended have a profound influence on academic performance (Appendix D). The following recommendations focus on four areas that the study participants mentioned as already in place at the

institution and considered by them to be effective or potentially effective: institutional behavioral change, early intervention programs, faculty of color, and teaching strategies for faculty. Although these recommendations are not extensive, implementing these suggestions in public schools and institutions of higher education can continue the process of supporting diversity in education.

### **Institutional Behavioral Change**

While most of the participants agreed that the study institution (in this case The University of Texas at Austin) provided satisfactory programs and/or facilities targeted toward diversification, there was a consensus that the institution did not adequately address issues of environmental change or campus climate. Many of the participants discussed programs that targeted diversity issues during orientation activities. Several also mentioned groups on campus that provided an outlet for interaction with a variety of people, as well as groups that specifically provided an opportunity to identify with other African American men. Even while acknowledging the value of these groups, most of the participants commented that most of the resistance that they had encountered on campus came in the form of preconceptions held by others on campus.

When an administrator or institution decides to change the campus climate and the deficit perception of African American males, several strategies must be used prior to embarking on that change. Unfortunately, utilizing the model for institutional change proposed by Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) 32 years later is still an appropriate option because the realm of higher education has not changed much in that period and is still not perceived as welcoming all students. First, the organization must define its specific goals. Failure to do this has been the undoing of more than one cultural change. According to Sedlacek and Brooks, five key points are necessary to consider in defining organizational and institutional goals.

1. Goals must be stated to provide direction for change. Without stated goals, energy and action become misdirected and random and a change does not take place.

2. Goals should be as specific and operational as possible. Following this principle will help to avoid the “umbrella” goal, such as “eliminating racism in an institution,” and substitute a series of subgoals, such as “increase the number of Black teachers” and “incorporate the contributions of minorities in the Chemistry 1 curriculum.”

3. Strategies are separate from goals in that they are ways of accomplishing goals. Institutions must be able to separate means from ends.

4. Goals must be adjusted to the context of the times. While enrolling more Black males in predominantly White institutions may be appropriate in 2007, it may be inappropriate in 2010. For example, if compelling evidence should become available that African American men do better in society by attending all-Black schools, then goals and strategies should be shifted.

5. All goals must be evaluated and the extent of their accomplishment measured.

As the first key point states, goals must be stated not only to provide direction but also to provide consistency. As shown in the study, the majority of the participants rated the administration as adequately meeting the needs of the students of color on campus. As Sedlacek pointed out, if this goal does is not met, energy and action become misdirected and random and change does not take place. A clear-cut direction also helps to avoid the “umbrella effect” to which Sedlacek referred in the second point. If true change is to take place, the university must create policies that will effect change for *all* students.

Examples of goals for institutions include the following (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976):

1. Change the concept of teacher quotas and develop a fair policy.
2. Integrate minority and racism-related content into the curriculum; for example, rather than institute African American month, integrate into the curriculum an ongoing program on the contributions, feelings, and lifestyles of minorities.
3. Change the use of standardized test scores for admissions and other alternatives rather than eliminating the tests.
4. Find ways to involve African American students' parents in school programs.
5. Develop proper techniques for teaching standard English to Black males, while making sure that their current speech style is denigrated in the process.
6. Find appropriate standards for judging and developing programs for African Americans in a positive way. Cultural and racial differences exist, and it is logical to use various techniques and criteria to judge success or failure.
7. Experience and understanding of racism and race relations should be required of all school personnel.
8. Black scholars should be included in the process of developing curricula. Not only does this have an important role in modeling applications for Black male students, it shows White and Black students that African Americans can and do perform many important roles in society and serves as an intermediate goal on the way to acquiring more full-time Black faculty members.

Several of the participants mentioned that they would welcome the opportunity to interact with faculty. Saviour commented that the faculty-student relationship might be stronger if the faculty member and student were of the same race. When Black males have an opportunity to interact with and observe faculty of color create programs and integrate materials into the curriculum, the role of scholar/professor becomes a reality

for the students, indicating that the role of a scholar/professor is attainable by them as well.

### **Early Intervention Programs**

The earlier the student knows about college and the concept of life-long learning, the better. All of the young men in this study stated that it had not been a question of *whether* they would go to college; rather, it was a question of *where* they would go to college. All of the participants reported that their familiar and extended support systems had played an integral part in ensuring that they received up-to-date college materials and scholarship information.

Early intervention programs have played a significant role in providing services, particularly for minority youth. As participation rates of African American students continue to increase, services that will guide them to successful entrance and transition to college life will be key determinants in student retention and graduation. Although there has been a significant increase in the higher education rates of minorities, this group is predominantly concentrated at community colleges, with few transferring to 4-year institutions (Brewer, 1990). Most minority students (83.7%) are still enrolled in lower-cost public institutions (Wilds & Wilson, 1998). Therefore, programs to increase college and university participation by minorities must target public 2-year and technical colleges.

If the goal is to increase participation of first-generation, low-income minority students at 4-year institutions, early intervention programs should provide college preparation for more African American male students to meet the criteria of the more selective public flagship and private institutions. These initiatives can also decrease the gaps between the participation rates of White males and African American males, while

addressing the lack of representation of minorities in certain career fields, including mathematics and science (Martin, 2007).

Early intervention programs such as the I Have A Dream Foundation (IHAD), National Early Intervention Scholarship Program (NEISP), and GEAR-UP provide a solid framework to increase the retention of first-generation, low-income minority students. African American male students are less likely than White male students to graduate from college and complete a 4-year degree, especially at predominantly White institutions (Brewer, 1990; Wilds & Wilson, 1998). Therefore, the concern for students of color in higher education does not stop with access into the institution but continues with providing resources to retain these students. By implementing ongoing educational programs and student support services within the community and at postsecondary institutions, minority student concerns and issues in higher education are addressed at an early stage of college student development (Martin, 2007). Some of the programs that have experienced success in the transition of African American males are listed in Appendix E.

### **Faculty of Color**

With the ever-changing demographics of the student population and the stagnant nature of faculty racial composition over the past 20 years (Appendix F), the retention of faculty of color at predominantly White institutions continues to be a significant issue in higher education. Knefelkamp (University of Michigan, 1998, ¶ 2), “In order for higher education to be more effective, we must have an accurate reflection of society represented within higher education.” Faculty that resemble African American males will serve to increase the number of African American males on campuses of higher education. This requires an environment of equality and inclusion. Several participants mentioned that faculty of color (faculty who “looked like them”) could possibly



understand what the students had experienced in life, which would be an excellent addition to the campus experience. Bonner (2003) asserted that acclimating to the higher education environment has proven to be a formidable task for many minority faculty members. Particularly among the ranks of certain subcultures—women, cultural and ethnic minorities, gay and lesbian instructors—experiences with these environments have been described as “chilly.”

To truly tap into the knowledge stores and intellectual reserves maintained by African American scholars, academe must first meet their most basic needs: Establish a safe and inclusive environment to successfully engage in critical discourse, create a forum to bond with peers, develop a means to foster viable connections with students and increase opportunities to interface with the institution. (¶ 4)

Creating opportunities to network with other students and faculty of color is challenging because there are fewer students of color in graduate programs and fewer faculty of color in tenure track positions. Reaching out to those who are present and creating a welcoming environment for new students and faculty of color will promote the type of diversity that enhances the academic atmosphere (Venegas, 2001).

### **Teaching Strategies for Faculty**

Carey and Forsyth (2007) suggested teaching strategies that could assist administration and faculty efforts in reaching out to young Black males in the classroom. They stated that helping students to understand differences among the constructs of related social-cognitive theories, such as self-efficacy, outcome expectancies, behavioral intentions, self-esteem, and optimism, can provide a better understanding of the students’ own issues. This strategy is consistent with the responses given by the participants in this study, citing regular occurrences of feelings of isolation and negative stereotyping in the classroom. Encouraging students to develop a measure of self-efficacy for any academic-related behavior that avoids the confounding of self-efficacy with these other constructs is necessary. If academic behavior is socially stigmatized

(e.g., low self-efficacy, low self-esteem) or if social norms suggest that one should engage frequently in a behavior (e.g., exercise), then social desirability response biases might inflate self-efficacy scores. Carey and Forsyth suggest that helping students to design an intervention program will enhance self-efficacy and possibly alter risky behaviors. This researcher contends that allowing the student to take part in self-diagnosis, in a sense assisting in his or her own treatment, will allow the student to have some sense of ownership concerning the issue.

If society is sincere in the attempt to address the issues that confront African American males and their troubled journey into higher education, it is important to enhance and reinforce not only their identities as students but also their identities as competent, intelligent, successful men. Societal perception and social messages are important factors in forming and maintaining high self-efficacy. “Just as Black males perceive themselves as superior in athletics and entertaining, they must also perceive themselves as superior and competent in the academic arena as well” (Whiting, 2006, p. 4). This means developing programs and strategies that improve their self-efficacy, target their self-efficacy, increase their willingness to make sacrifices, enhance their academic self-concept, improve their need for improvement, improve their need for achievement, increase their self-awareness, change their beliefs about the power of effort, enhance their concepts of masculinity, and nurture their racial pride (Whiting).

Many educators speculate that students of color learn best when they are actively involved in the process. Researchers (e.g., Chickering & Gamson, 1991) have reported that, regardless of the subject matter, students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats. Students who work in collaborative groups also appear more satisfied with their classes (Beckman, 1990; Chickering & Gamson; Collier, 1980;

Cooper, 1990; Goodsell, Maher, & Tinto, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991). This is consistent with the findings of this study. For example, Colin stated that he appreciated the support that he received from other Black students on campus. Various names have been given to this form of teaching, with some distinctions among them: cooperative learning, collaborative learning, collective learning, learning communities, peer teaching, peer learning, reciprocal learning, team learning, study circles, study groups, and work groups. But all in all, there are three general types of group work: informal learning groups, formal learning groups, and study teams (Johnson et al.). These intimate styles of learning strategies have shown tremendous results in academic growth among students of color (Lardner, 2003).

The institution in this study has taken great steps related to the recommendations presented above to address multicultural issues on campus. In 2005 the university announced that the promotion of Dr. Gregory J. Vincent to the new position of Vice President for Diversity and Community Engagement. Dr. Vincent's responsibilities are to work with a broad range of student, faculty, staff, and community constituents to make the university a more inviting and inclusive environment and to develop strategies to connect intellectual resources of the university to communities across Texas.

### *Moving Beyond the Deficit Perspective*

With entrance to a new millennium, society is faced with new and challenging problems. Among them are economic constraints, educational restructuring, the ever-present challenge of diversity or lack thereof, and the continuing need for educational and racial equality. In this environment, higher education will not be able to ignore the demands and needs of society and will be called on to address these challenges (Zusman, 1999), which include a major restructuring of society's institutional arrangements. Educational policy makers will be challenged to create innovative approaches that will

provide colleges and universities enough autonomy and flexibility to accomplish these challenges and goals, which have been created by a society that has not adjusted well to change or the deficit perspective of the African American male.

Recognizing that Black males are not merely victims but may also be active agents in their own failure means that interventions designed to help them must consider this notion as well. Changing policies, creating new programs, and opening new opportunities will accomplish little if such efforts are not accompanied by strategies to actively engage Black males and their families to take responsibility to improve their circumstances (Fashola, 2005). Institutionally, this may require programmatic interventions aimed at buffering and offsetting the various risks to which Black males are particularly vulnerable. Fashola stated that effective initiatives must also involve efforts to counter and transform cultural and environmental patterns and the attitude that Black males have adopted toward education. One of the best ways to learn how this can be done is to study those schools and programs that have been successful in accomplishing this goal.

Demonstrations of racism are deeply rooted in the societal perceptions of African American males and the generalized stereotype of them being intellectually incompetent. This perception affects Black males not only internally but also externally through today's policies in higher education.

Researchers and policymakers rarely include the individuals who are the focus of their studies in the development of solutions to their own problems. Although individuals or groups are often asked their opinions about their plight, they are seldom asked to participate in the development of programs or models that will improve their lives. The very persons who would be most affected and who should be the first to be

consulted are not given a voice in the dialogue, as if they had no stake in these important decisions that determine the course of the policies that will affect their lives.

While America has made progress in rectifying the devastating impact of discriminative practices both socially and politically, which were at one time not only common but accepted and viewed as norms, society has a long way before claiming meaningless victories of temporary change. The nation has not moved away from a discriminative mentality. Although laws have been reviewed and changed and some restrictions have been lifted, according to some of the findings about how Black males perceive themselves and their place in society and how they think others perceive them have not changed.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

More research is needed to expand the body of knowledge regarding college recruitment, retention, and successful transition into higher education by African American males. An evaluation in the form of a campus climate survey or a focus group study should be performed every 3 to 5 years in the form of a summative survey. The evaluation or focus group could serve as an institutional initiative or part of a strategic plan for an institution of higher education. This effort would serve as a depth check to ensure that the efforts in place were appropriately addressing the needs of African American males attending the university. Also, such a regular check would identify new themes that may have emerged within the ever-changing academic environment.

It may also be beneficial to conduct a study focusing on the relationship of the African American community and institutions of higher education based on the role each of them plays in the development of educational achievement by African American male.

The institutional support system, followed closely by self-efficacy, seems to be the most important variable in a young Black male's academic success. A study of the support systems and the extent of their influence would be useful not only to administrators and faculty in higher education, but also to families and societal supporters of young Black males. Suggestions of components of a successful support system are provided in Appendix G.

This study was limited by the setting, sample size, and the instruments used. Most of the identified programs or strategies concerning diversity within the university were focused on diversification of all students of color, not specifically African American males. Therefore, findings may not translate to other colleges or universities looking for a "silver bullet" strategy. The sample size was small, which suggests that the findings are not generalizable to the academic experiences of all African American males at all predominantly White institutions. A larger sample size might produce more helpful results.

In reviewing the data it was noted that the parents of a couple of the participants had not been born in the United States. One participant reported that his parents had stated that immigrants were 20% to 30% more likely to be successful and be millionaires than people born in the United States. Ogbu's (1983) cultural-ecological theory suggests the same premise, theorizing that immigrants are more likely to adapt to the White middle-class norms on which U.S. schools are based. An examination of differences of ethnicities within the subculture of the African American race might be productive. Such research might offer more specific suggestions regarding how African American males and colleges and universities can ensure that efforts concerning African American males are effective. (In the present study, the parents of five participants—Colin, Damian,

Jesse, Justin, and Wayne—were born within the United States, while the parents of Andrew and Saviour were born outside the United States.)

Finally, a review of a psychological developmental systems model, referred to as an “Asset model” by some, emphasizing the notion that all youth have individual and contextual assets that may be used to promote positive behavior and development (Adams, & Marshall, 1996). This would prove beneficial for administrators, faculty members and others that work directly with this specific population.

### **Closing Thoughts**

One’s race or ethnic background may impart something about how one arrives at one’s present situation, what barriers were overcome, and what one’s prospects are for further growth. While there are many problems and challenges to members of minorities, not every member of a minority group has had to surmount substantial obstacles (Bowen & Bok, 1998).

Information on factors contributing to low achievement outcomes by males, Black males in particular (at the K-12 and postsecondary education levels) presents a theoretical view of the causes of low achievement and introduces the question of building a research agenda. The goal of increasing African American male enrollment patterns and academic preparation in higher education raises questions to stimulate research focused not simply on observing trends but rather on understanding successful education initiatives and assessing the extent of their scalability as a foundation for policy enactment.

Education is an important foundation for achievement and success for all. According to Jackson and Moore (2006), education level determines the degree of social mobility in society. Therefore, improving the odds of earning a college degree or attaining some other type of postsecondary certification is an important goal, especially

for students who have navigated the K-12 educational pipeline. However, disenfranchised student groups demand attention. Policies focused exclusively on education are incomplete, especially regarding disconnected Black males (Edelman et al., 2006.)

Efforts to improve the chances of academic success for minority students should start as early as prekindergarten so students can build a solid academic foundation. In order to reach all groups of students, educational programs must expand to include quality work training and programs for dropouts and those who are incarcerated. Likewise, parenting classes must be part of the remedy so that another generation of Black boys does not grow up without fathers, role models, and providers.

The African American male's continued slide into dissolution will not disappear on its own. Neglect will only make it worse. To reverse this terrible trend will require collective effort by government, faith-based organizations, social service groups, foundations, schools, businesses, and all segments of society.

It is understandable that African American youth would have less faith in the education system than do students from more privileged groups. Instead of regarding African American males as "disruptive" to classroom norms, educators could instead regard their resistance as normative, given their personal experience and cultural history. Reforming the classroom will be more effective than overmedicating, slow tracking, or excluding these young men.

Many young Black males have trouble gaining a foothold in the labor market. For them, college graduation is less realistic than attaining strong work skills. Frequently, young African American males and low-income students encounter myriad conflicting factors (family, school, neighborhood, labor market, and attitudes) that seem to limit their motivation to achieve in school. Compounding these factors is a lack of



direct connections between employers and high schools. Despite the relationship to future success, studies shows that employers pay little attention to school performance when they hire young people (Rosenbaum, 1995). This pattern seems to reinforce the misperception among disconnected Black males that school is irrelevant to work. Moreover, many young African American males perceive that employment is scarce. When they are limited to low-wage work, their tendency to disconnect from both the labor market and school is exacerbated. The disconnection between school and labor factors begins at early ages and is apparently reinforced throughout adolescence (Edelman et al., 2006). Unless these issues are addressed, African American males will not compete successfully in the global economy. Instead, they will be removed from the economy and incarcerated or placed on public assistance (Cox, Matthews, and Associates, 1993).

It might be easy to write off the African American male, but the consequences of ignoring them affect all of society. Experts offer many theories about the root causes of the decline of young Black men. Some trace the decline to the breakdown of the Black family and high numbers of out-of-wedlock births among African American women. Others point to the poverty faced by many African American families (according to Roberts [2002], approximately one third of Black children live in poverty). Others attribute the decline to the lasting effects of racism in the work place and in society. It is likely that a combination of all of these factors contributes to diminished opportunities for African Americans. No matter the exact cause, the remedy is the same: A high-quality education, a focus on the family support structure, and an emphasis on successful mentoring programs should ultimately reveal a path out of poverty.

One of the current challenges to society in its efforts to increase the academic success of the African American male is to create an educational system that promotes a

just and comprehensive society that all students and groups perceive as their own. Until institutions can create a level field of educational opportunity for all, incorporating perspectives from scholars of color into mainstream educational research and shifting the societal mentality to one of equality and justice, it is up to those categorized as underrepresented who have achieved a higher level of learning to educate or enlighten the underrepresented who have not yet been afforded that opportunity. Sharing knowledge will not only empower the aforementioned but will also present new possibilities for academic and social success. Such programs include those specifically developed to address the particular issues of African American males.

It is a fallacy to think that educational systems alone can close achievement gaps. As some schools provide better curriculum and academic rigor, the bar of success is raised for some students but, most assuredly, not for all. Efforts are under way to improve curriculum, increase the training of teachers and administrators, and raise achievement standards. While these actions and policies are essential, they cannot stand alone. Changes must be approached holistically and systematically so that efforts to improve the academic and social success of African American students in higher education are successful.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

## Background Questionnaire

Opening statement:

We are here to go over a series of questions that will help the researcher glean a better understanding of the factors that assisted you in the decision to pursue a college degree.

1. What are you most proud of?
2. What did you want to be when you grew up? And why?
3. What do you do in your spare time?
4. What serves as a motivator to help get you through school? Have you used these motivators in other aspects of your life?
5. What personal traits or qualities do you feel could be strengthened or improved?
6. Do you set goals for yourself? What types of goals have you set for yourself in the past, were you successful in working toward their accomplishment?
7. How would you describe yourself?
8. Tell me about one of your failures and what you learned from it.
9. Growing up, what was your relationship like with your parents?
10. Did you have anyone other than your parent(s) that helped guide or raise you?
11. Can you talk to me about?
  - A) What your academic performance was like in elementary?,
  - B) What your academic performance was like in middle school?,
  - C) What your academic performance was like in and high school?
    - i. Did you take advanced courses?
    - ii. What were your favorite courses?
12. Can you talk to me about the reason(s) you wanted go to college?



13. Can you name the most important people you think helped you get into college? What did they do to help influence your decision?
14. Have you ever thought of not going to college? What would you do?
15. What kind of position are you looking for when you graduate?
16. What do you expect to be doing seven years from now?
17. Do you consider yourself a leader? Why? Give me an example of a time that you showed initiative and took the lead.
18. Give me an example of a high-pressure situation you have faced this past year and how you resolved it.
19. Describe a situation in which you used persuasion to convince someone to see things your way.

By Ron Brown

**APPENDIX B**  
**PARTICIPANT PROFILE FORM**

Name:  
Street Address:  
City State Zip:  
Home Phone ( ) Cellular Phone ( ):  
E-Mail Address:  
Hometown State:

**Academic Information**

Year in School Freshman Sophomore Junior *0* Senior  
Major(s)  
Minor(s)  
Exact Final High School GPA 4.00 scale  
Exact Current Undergraduate Cumulative GPA 4.00 scale (*please do not estimate*)

**Background Information**

Family Structure Two Parents/ Guardian (not a parent)  
Single Parent Household (mother) Single Parent Household (father)  
Other  
Please Explain

**Undergraduate Activities****Honors, Awards, and Achievements**

Award Year(s) Received

**Internships**

Year Company  
City State  
Year Company

**APPENDIX C**  
**CONSENT FORM**

### Confidentiality Agreement

It is understood and agreed to that the below identified discloser of confidential information may provide certain information that is and must be kept confidential. To ensure the protection of such information, and to preserve any confidentiality necessary under patent and/or trade secret laws, it is agreed that

1. The Confidential Information to be disclosed can be described as and includes:

Information is designated as "Confidential Information" at the time of its disclosure.

2. The Recipient agrees not to disclose the confidential information obtained from the discloser to anyone unless required to do so by law.

3. This Agreement states the entire agreement between the parties concerning the disclosure of Confidential Information. Any addition or modification to this Agreement must be made in writing and signed by the parties.

4. If any of the provisions of this Agreement are found to be unenforceable, the remainder shall be enforced as fully as possible and the unenforceable provision(s) shall be deemed modified to the limited extent required to permit enforcement of the Agreement as a whole.

**WHEREFORE**, the parties acknowledge that they have read and understand this Agreement and voluntarily accept the duties and obligations set forth herein.

Recipient of Confidential Information:

Name (Print or Type):

Signature:

Date:

Discloser of Confidential Information:

Name (Print of Type):

Signature:

Date:

**APPENDIX D**  
**SEDLACEK'S VARIABLES OF MOTIVATION**  
**AND PERSISTENCE**

### **Motivation and Persistence**

Motivation and persistence have a profound influence on academic performance. According to Sedlacek (1983), these variables are:

1. A positive self-concept
2. Understanding and dealing with racism
3. A realistic self-appraisal
4. The preference of long-range goals to immediate needs
5. The availability of a strong support person
6. Successful leadership experiences
7. Demonstrated community services
8. Nontraditional knowledge

**APPENDIX E**  
**COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS**  
**AIMED AT YOUNG BLACK MEN**



## **College and University Programs Aimed at Young Black Men**

### **1. Project Guide Right: Boys to Men**

Started: June 1996

Focus: college preparation for African-American males 12-14 who participate in sports

Funding: Virginia State University provides housing; Petersburg Youth Football Association; Ettrick Youth Sports Association

Director: Dr. Carol Hardy

### **2. African American Male Academy: James Madison University**

Started: 1994

Focus: providing African-American males in junior and senior high school with an intensive academic summer program and leadership training with school-year follow-up

Funding: Virginia Council of Higher Education, James Madison University and private funding

Director: Mr. Byron Bullock

### **3. Meyerhoff Scholars: University of Maryland-Baltimore County**

Started: 1989

Focus: undergraduate preparation to increase the number of African Americans earning terminal degrees in science, engineering, and medicine

Funding: Robert and Jane Meyerhoff; federal grants; private donations

Director: Ernestine Baker

### **4. Black Men Think Tank: University of Cincinnati**

Started: 1983

Focus: providing undergraduate Black males with mentoring and a forum to deal with issues affecting success in college

Funding: University and private funding

Director: Dr. Eric Abercrombie

**5. 100 African American Men: Washington State University**

Started: Fall 1995

Focus: providing undergraduate Black males with mentoring and a forum to deal with issues affecting success in college

Funding: member dues; private donations; university provides meeting space

Director: Dr. Lee Jones

**6. Florida State Progressive Black Men**

Started: 1989

Focus: Issues and concerns of Black Males

Funding: Student Government Association

Advisor: Pomeroy Brinkley

**7. Young Black Scholars: UCLA**

Started: June 1986

Focus: African-American boys and girls, grades 8-12

Funding: 100 Black Men of Los Angeles; donations from community-based organizations; university provides office support

Director: Dr. Winston Doby

**8 Annual African American Male Summit: University of Texas-Austin**

Started: 1995

Focus: Providing mentoring and forum to discuss issues for undergraduate, high school, middle school, and elementary school Black males in Texas Big-12 schools.

Funding: University Texas-Austin; private donations

Director: Dr. Brenda Burr

**9. Toledo EXCEL**

Started: 1988-89

**APPENDIX F**  
**BLACK FACULTY DEMOGRAPHICS**

**Black Faculty at the Nation's  
Highest-Ranked Liberal Arts Colleges, 2007**

	<b>Full-Time Faculty</b>		<b>Percent Black</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Black</b>	
Mount Holyoke College	185	18	9.7 %
Haverford College	128	11	8.6
Swarthmore College	164	11	6.7
Wesleyan University	333	19	5.7
Pomona College	197	11	5.6
Amherst College	212	11	5.2
Wellesley College	347	18	5.2
Colgate University	292	15	5.1
Williams College	337	17	5.0
Bates College	207	10	4.8
Oberlin College	274	13	4.7
Vassar College	318	15	4.7
Carleton College	239	11	4.6
Washington & Lee Univ.	274	12	4.4
Bryn Mawr College	148	6	4.1
Hamilton College	193	8	4.1
Grinnell College	206	8	3.9
Davidson College	162	6	3.7
Smith College	275	10	3.6
Middlebury College	307	9	2.9
Macalester College	154	4	2.6
Colby College	157	3	1.9
Claremont McKenna Col.*	126	2	1.6
Harvey Mudd College	85	1	1.2
Bowdoin College	161	1	0.6

\*Declined to participate in the 2007 JBHE survey. Data is from a similar survey conducted in 2005.

Source: JBHE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT.

Source: The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, by author, (2005)

**APPENDIX G**  
**SUGGESTIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL**  
**STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEM**

### **Student Support System**

1. Support from the administration, by incorporating college going strategies into their school mission, vision, or strategic plan.
2. Recruit faculty for participation, if possible complete staff buy in.
3. Provide motivational lectures (given by African Americans).
4. Provide proactive financial aid counseling.
5. Get students involved with programs and activities.
6. Maintain up to date information on AP courses, courses needed to be considered college ready, stats on job descriptions and the types of money associated with those positions.
7. Regular assessment of program effectiveness.
8. Incorporate early assessment and intervention (the signing of contracts and promissory documents to the students).
9. Develop faculty mentoring (obtain possible foundation money to help burden the cost of tutoring, incentive to teachers).
10. Develop leadership programs and seminars.
11. Develop a caring and competent staff of qualified professionals.
12. Create an “Affirming” college going culture to encourage and expose students to the positive rewards of higher education.

**VITA**

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Professional: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Austin, TX  
Program Director (Participation and Success), 2005-present

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Program Director (Finance, Research, & Campus Planning),  
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Student Affairs and Career Service Coordinator, 1998-2000

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