

REDEFINING THE DREAM: AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE VOICES ON
ACADEMIC SUCCESS

by

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2008

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

African American males encounter difficulty in achieving academic success throughout their entire educational experience (K-16) (Allen-Meares, 1999; Cuyjet, 1997; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Fordham, 1988; Irvine, 1990; Kunjufu, 2001; Stewart, 1992; Thomas, 1999). These difficulties include: a disproportionate representation in special education programs, high rates of suspension and expulsion, high dropout rates, norm-referenced tests, other assessment devices, labeling/tracking tactics, teacher expectations, stereotyping, stereotype threat, personal impotence (Baker & Steiner, 1996; Delpit, 2006; Ferguson, 2001; Hale, 2001; Hamilton, 2007; Kunjufu, 2001; Steele, 1999; J. M. Patton, 1998).

Hale (2001) concluded that under conventional teaching practices, the longer African American children “stayed in school, the more their performance deteriorated [they] do not enter school disadvantaged, they leave school disadvantaged” (p. 103). Steele’s (1992) assessment concurred with Hale in that although African American students began school with test scores that were fairly close to the test scores of white students their age, the longer the African American students stayed in school, the more they fell behind:

By the sixth grade, blacks in many school districts are two full grades behind whites in achievement. This pattern holds true in middle school. . . and the record does not improve in high school. . . . Even for blacks who make it to college, the problem doesn’t go away . . . 70 percent of black

students who enroll in four-year colleges drop out at some point as compared with 45 percent of whites. (p. 68)

The difficulties have been so daunting that several researchers have equated the situation to that of an “endangered species” (George, 1993; Gibbs, 1988; Polite & Davis, 1999). At the chronological junctures when other young men are living lives filled with educational opportunities, career choices and adulthood development, African American men face unyielding challenges to their growth and educational achievement. By the ages of 14 to 16 years old, when African American males should be matriculating through high school, over 20% have abandoned any hopes of educational achievement and typically drop out in despair and frustration (Herbert, 2003; Kunjufu, 2001; Olszewski, 2003). In many urban cities, the percentages of dropouts are closer to 50% to 70% (Locke, 1999). Of the African American males that maintain educational determination, almost 20% of those 16-17 years old often lag two or more grade levels behind their peers (Locke, 1999). Suspensions and expulsions are more likely among African American males than any other student population (Kunjufu, 2001). The national average African American male high school dropout rate in 1991 was 15.4%; in the year 2000, this figure rose to 17.6% (Locke, 1999; NCES, 2000). Due to these and other contributing factors, African American males are less likely to participate in college preparatory courses or to encounter counselors or teachers who encourage them to consider higher educational opportunities (Fleming, 1984; Irvine, 1990; Thomas, 1999).

Those African American males who overcome the educational and social

pitfalls from kindergarten to twelfth grade continue to face many challenges upon matriculating in college (Bird, 1996; Cuyjet, 1997; Garabaldi, 1992; Irvine, 1990; Stewart, 1992; Tinto, 1993). These challenges include, but are not limited to: college preparation issues, lacking financial support, combating racism, cultural identity issues, cultural disconnect from campus, lack of social support or mentoring and dissatisfaction with college experiences (Cuyjet, 1997; Fleming, 1984; Rome 2001; Steele, 1999; Tinto, 1993). African American males represent less than 3% of the total U.S. student enrollment in colleges and universities (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998; Davis, 2001). Despite these low numbers, African American males disproportionately represent students who withdraw, or have low academic performance and/or who have the greatest dissatisfaction with campus culture and college life in higher education (Cuyjet, 1997; Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984; Irvine, 1990; Locke, 1999; Stewart, 1992).

The academic success and participation rates of African American men in higher education have declined steadily over the past several decades (Allen-Meares, 1999; Davis, 1999; Polite & Davis, 1999; Slater, 1995). African American male higher education achievement lags far behind the higher education achievement and participation rates of African American women (Slater, 1995). In fact, the increase in African American participation in higher education over the past ten years is attributable almost exclusively to the increased college participation rates of African American women (Allen-Meares, 1999; Slater, 1995). African American women college participation rates increased by almost ten percent throughout the 1990s, while the participation rates for African

American men experienced no increase (Jones, 2001). African Americans have the highest gender gap in college participation rates of all ethnic groups (Cuyjet, 1997; Jones, 2001; Slater, 1995). According to the 1997 Department of Education statistics, African American women in higher education outnumber African American men 971,000 to 580,000 respectively. African American men make up only 37.4% of all African Americans enrolled in higher education (Jones, 2001). This is a gender difference of almost 2 to 1. The comparison rates are not much better if we isolate African American participation at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). At HBCUs African American women are 136,798 or 61% of the student population and African American men lag behind at 87,097 or 39% (Roach, 2001).

African American students lag behind all other racial/ethnic groups except the American Indian (De Sousa, 2001) and with a community college graduation rate of twenty-seven percent, African American males are in last place of all ethnic groups attending community colleges (Mosby, Esters, Robinson, & Beckles, 2006). De Sousa went on to say that “retaining students of color, particularly African Americans, remains a major challenge for American higher education” (p. 22). Mosby et al. concur, and added that “promoting the academic success of African American males is a successful method of predicting retention” (p. 8).

Statement of the Problem

The last decade has seen a sharp increase in attention directed by researchers to the educational challenges of African American males (Davis, 1999; Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998; Kunjufu, 2001; Locke, 1999; Polite & Davis, 1999; Price, 2000). Many studies have also focused on how persistent the problem has been (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper, 2004; Howard-Hamilton, 1997; Hrabowski & Pearson, 1993; Moore, Flowers, Guion, Zhang, & Staten, 2004; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). Much of the extant research includes studies that indicate the plight or absence of African American men in higher education, but still not enough is known about the educational successes of this same group (Hamilton, 2007).

The singular traditional focus of trying to understand the reasons for the underachievement of African American males in higher education from a deficit approach negates the fact that many African American men have achieved considerable academic success at four-year institutions (Hrabowski et al., 1998; Major & Billson, 1992; Ross, 1998). Several researchers sought to identify causes for the disturbing degree of underachievement in the academic arena for African American males in higher education (Brown, 1999; Davis, 1999; Fisher, 1999; Garibaldi, 1992; Irvine, 1990). By catering to the deficit model, the research that does exist on the educational experiences of African American males in higher education supports the notion that many of these young men are “trapped” in a cycle of academic failure (Allen-Meares, 1999; Polite & Davis, 1999; Roach). To be most effective, research and theory should move beyond

the deficit model approach toward a more relevant model of African American academic success, if educators, researchers, and higher education administrators are to have any success in affecting positive change in the educational experiences of African American men (Fordham, 1988; Hilliard, 1992; Irvine, 1990; Kunjufu, 1995; Steele, 1999).

The American sociopolitical climate places tremendous obstacles in the lives of many African American. Research has recently begun to uncover this information (Kunjufu, 2001; Madhubuti, 1990; White & Cones, 2000; Wilson, 1996). Lavin-Loucks (2006) reported that it is not just a gap in achievement, but also extends to other areas of life as well and correlates with drug use, mortality, and disease. Other researchers have asserted that the educational challenges confronting African American males are exacerbated by their everyday life issues, including: frustration, anger, stress, anxiety, untreated depression, discrimination, and racial hostility (Cochran & Mays, 1994; Kunjufu, 2001; Locke, 1999). Recent research in the areas of health, employment, violence, education, incarceration rates, drug use and abuse, personal development, and family life corroborate this reality (Locke, 1999). Poor quality education, systemic racism and discrimination, unemployment, underemployment, incarceration rates and death rates of men between the ages of 16 to 26 are higher for African Americans than it is for any other social group in the nation (Blake & Darling, 1994; George, 1993; Kunjufu, 2001; Wilson, 1996). Although these obstacles continue to be impediments for African American men as they enter the

academic arena, they do not offer insight into why some African American males experience success in college.

Since the academic experience at post-secondary institutions is uniquely different for African American males than it is for students from other segments of the population, achieving academic success requires a different skill set for African American males than it does for their peers from other races (Davis, 1999; Fleming, 1984; Garibaldi, 1992). This conclusion led researchers to examine the similarity of the academic success process between African American students and White students. At present, scholars debate the validity of the assertions that the educational attainment process is different for different ethnic groups (Wolfe, 1985; McWhorter, 2000). Some researchers have found evidence for the different patterns in educational success between African Americans and other student populations (Davis, 1994; Irvine, 1990; McPhail & McPhail, 1999; Perna, 2000; Portes & Wilson, 1976), while others have concluded that the process is similar (Wolfe, 1985). However, the literature that found the educational process to be similar tended to focus on educational attainment in general, not higher education, and provided minimal insight into gender differences and used almost exclusively demographic and sociological variables (i.e. family socioeconomic status, parents' educational attainment, etc.) to determine its results (Tracey & Sedlaceck, 1986). There is a critical need for greater attention to the participation in, and academic success of African American males in higher education (Roach, 2001).

Although much of the extant empirical research has focused on African Americans in higher education, a significantly smaller body of literature exists when it comes to focusing on the factors that influence persistence of African American males in community college (Bush & Bush, 2005; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001/2002; Hampton, 2002; Holzman, 2006). The declining college participation rates and lack of academic success of African American males in community college are significant concerns for educators, researchers and administrators in community colleges throughout the country. With a graduation rate of 27 percent, the males who were categorized as 'Black, non-Hispanic' had the lowest graduation rate from community colleges of all ethnic groups in the nation (Mosby et al., 2006).

Furthermore, Williamson and Creamer (1988) found that the factors that influence persistence for students at four-year colleges are different from those that influence persistence at two-year colleges. The researchers also concluded that background characteristics which include race and gender play a major role in decisions to persist. Mosby et al. (2006) concluded that although this is considered among the greater challenges the nation's community colleges will face, because "approximately 52 percent of all African American undergraduate males attended two-year institutions" (p. 4). As a result, the American community college is best suited to address the issues confronting the African American male, if only that institution could figure out how to keep them enrolled long enough to obtain a degree or to transfer to a four-year school.

There is an emerging body of research concerning the participation and education difficulties experienced by African American males in community colleges. What remains to be studied in detail are the factors that promote academic success for African American men in the community college. The problem the current study will address is the failure of the research literature to reflect the voice of the African American male community college student.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that African American male community college students perceive as important to their academic success. A secondary purpose of this study is to contribute to the limited qualitative research on academically successful African American men in the American community college. The goal of the study is to give voice to and explore the perspectives of African American men in the American community college regarding the factors that contribute to their academic success.

Current research addressing African American male higher education academic success is limited (Roach, 2000, Ross, 1998). Research that identifies factors that impact academic success in community colleges from the perspectives of African American male students is very limited. It is important that these college students articulate their academic success stories. African American male students can provide valuable insights into the challenges many students need to overcome to be academically successful in community college. A greater understanding of this phenomenon will contribute to improving the higher education participation rates and graduation rates of African American

males. Additional qualitative research is needed that places the voices and experiences of African American males at the forefront of discussion on strategies to improve their academic achievement in higher education (Bird, 1996; Cuyjet, 1997; D'Aguelli & Hershberger, 1993; Gary & Booker, 1992; Irvine, 1990; Lavant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997; Roach, 2001; Ross, 1998; Thomas, 1999).

Significance of the Study

Studies highlighting historically ignored perspectives and voices are critically important in any effort to improve the quality of higher education in the United States (Osiris, 2005). However, to date, educational research and education practices have paid insufficient attention to the perceptions and insights of the marginalized groups in American society (Majors & Billson, 1992; Ross, 1998). Research that illuminates the voices and experiences of African American men in higher education has been very limited and, although recently on the increase, still predominated by a focus on the deficits of the group (Brown, 2007; Cuyjet, 2006; Cuyjet, 1997; Jones, 2001; Majors & Billson, 1992; Roach, 2000; Ross, 1998). More attention needs to be paid to the strengths exhibited by this group, in particular, the attitudes and skills, mindset, characteristics, and support mechanisms that promote their success academically (Bird, 1996; McMillian & Reed, 1993; Ross, 1998).

The voices of African American males in higher education are not often given center stage in empirical studies about their academic challenges, successes and development processes (Majors & Billings, 1992; Ross, 1998).

This study will fill a gap that was not addressed by the existing research on this problem and that is the failure of the research literature to reflect the voice of the African American male community college student. Specifically, the study will provide an opportunity for the students to articulate their experiences, to define their reasons for success and to take control of their own destinies in community colleges.

This appreciative inquiry provides an opportunity for African American men to tell their stories in their own voices. This study will provide an opportunity for the voices of African American men to be heard in the research literature. It will also contribute to the literature concerning achievement and persistence for African American men, qualitative research and community college policy and practice. The results of this study will inform educators, administrators, parents and policy developers to improve the American educational system for the benefit of all students, particularly African American males.

Research addressing the emerging “crisis” in African American male postsecondary attainment has not been on par with the steadily decreasing figures of African American men’s matriculation in higher education (Jones, 2001; Roach, 2000; Ross, 1998). Research on the experiences of African Americans in higher education has concentrated primarily on two areas: 1) the differential experience of these students relative to White students, and 2) the differential effects of attending TWIs as opposed to HBCUs (Thomas, 1999). Most of the current research generally focuses on the declining participation rates and increased attrition rates of African American males in higher education, while

paying scant attention to the qualitative aspects of these students' academic experiences (Green & Wright, 1992; Ross, 1998). Some researchers have theorized about the reasons for the limited academic success of African American men. These theories have been insightful, but have not provided holistic insight into what factors promote academic success for African American males in higher education (Allen-Meares, 1999; Fordham, 1988; Gregory, 2000; Irvine, 1990; Ogbu, 1998; Spradlin, Welsh & Hinson, 2000; Taylor, 1989). There is limited research that examines the unique experiences of academically successful African American men in community colleges (Bush & Bush, 2005; Hagedorn et al., 2001/2002; Hampton, 2002; Holzman, 2006). There is even less, if any, research that provides African American men an opportunity to articulate their perceptions of what factors promote their academic success in community college. This study will provide faculty, parents, counselors, student affairs professionals, retention specialists and program developers with a source of African American male student perspectives on the key factors that have helped them achieve academic success in the American community college.

Previous research regarding comprehensive strategies to support the academic success of African American males in higher education has indicated that the strategies have had limited success (Cuyject, 1997; D'Augelli, Hershberger, 1993; Fleming, 1984; Irvine, 1990; Lavant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997; Tinto, 1993). Additional research is needed to examine the phenomena at the community college level. The current study will to contribute to the relevant information on African American male experiences in community college. This

information can ultimately assist educational institutions in improving their efforts to address and promote the specific factors that contribute to all students' academic success in general and to African American male academic success in particular.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical frame for this study is informed by the four separate theoretical foundations of Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, and Appreciative Inquiry. No one of these theories, in and of themselves, were sufficient to fully provide a means for understanding both the contributing causes of the status of African American males in the community college, and supply a mechanism through which to "lift their voices". However, taken together, each of the theories provided a core component to form the resultant four-factor frame for this study. For the purposes of the current study, the researcher adopted those concepts that inform the study. The other concepts of these theories are not relevant as they do not advance the cause of the current study. Below is a discussion of how Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory, Critical Pedagogy, Appreciative Inquiry and their corresponding components are applied to form the theoretical perspective for the current study.

Critical Theory

The first theoretical frame is Critical Theory. Critical Theory is defined as a theory that seeks "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (Horkheimer, 1982, 244). Critical Theory is most frequently associated with the Frankfurt School or with individual philosophers including

Horkeimer, Adorno, Habermass, Benjamin and Marcuse and is concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender (Fay, 1987). “While critical theory is often thought of narrowly as referring to the Frankfurt School...any philosophical approach with similar practical aims could be called a critical theory, including feminism, critical race theory, and some forms of post-colonial criticism” (Stanford, 2005, p. 1).

Peters, Lankshear, and Olssen (2003) added that critical theory “comprises simply a philosophical orientation whose business it is to hasten developments which lead to a society without injustice” (p. 3). Per Macey (2000) critical theory:

Can be described as a theory that seeks to give social agents a critical purchase on what is normally taken for granted and that promotes the development of a free and self-determining society by dispelling the illusions of ideology. [It] seeks to explain why social agents accept or consent to systems of collective representations that do not serve their objective interests but legitimate the existing power structure, and exposes the falsity of non-cognitive beliefs (such as value-judgments) that are presented as cognitive structures. The nightmare vision of the Frankfurt School...is one of an ‘administered’ modern industrial society which has such ideological control over the deepest desires and feelings of its subjects that they are quite literally unaware of their exploitation, frustration and unhappiness. The goal of critical theory is to preclude the emergence of such a society by demonstrating that a transition to a freer and more fulfilling society is objectively or theoretically possible, and then

by demonstrating that the existing state of society is so unsatisfactory and frustrating that it *ought* to be transformed. Determinism is avoided by adding the important proviso that the transformation can come about only if social agents can accept the theses of critical theory as a form of self-consciousness that can act as a guide to emancipatory action. (p. 75)

Reduced to its simplest form, critical theory empowers individuals to question the prevailing assumptions about reality. In the context of the current study, this component of critical theory is applied as the ability of African American male community college students to question the prevailing assumptions about their experience in the community college.

Critical Race Theory

The second component of the theoretical frame is drawn from Critical Race Theory (CRT). “Critical race theory (CRT) is important because this theoretical framework recognizes, appreciates and values the importance of perspectives of people outside of the dominant culture” (Osiris, 2005, p. 91). Osiris further stated that CRT recognizes the experiential knowledge of African Americans and other ethnic minority groups as legitimate and provides a venue in which people can share their experiential knowledge through their voices.

CRT is grounded by the civil rights struggles for justice and equality of opportunity and it further supports a platform on which the African American male perspective can be recognized (Berry, 2001). When applied to education, CRT can confront the social construction of race, racism in its many forms, and the damaging stereotypes that negatively impact on the educational experiences of

African American males (Delgado, 1995; Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 1999; Solorzano & Villalpando, 1998).

Delgado (1995) argued that the stories of people of color are born from a different frame of reference, and therefore impart to them a voice that is different from the dominant culture of *hegemonic whiteness* and deserves to be heard.

Macey's (2000) definition of hegemony contained the following description of how hegemonic whiteness is maintained:

The term derives from the Greek *hegemon*, meaning leader, prominent power or dominant state or person and is widely used to denote political dominance. A more specific and sophisticated concept of hegemony is elaborated by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* (1971).

Gramsci's notion of hegemony makes an important contribution to the theory of ideology...Whereas the state establishes and reproduces the dominance of a ruling group through direct forms of domination ranging from legislation to coercion, civil society reproduces its hegemony by ensuring that the mass of the population 'spontaneously' consents to the general direction imposed upon social life by the ruling group. The establishment of a hegemony is the task of the organic intellectuals of the ruling class. At the highest level, they create philosophy, the sciences and the arts; at a lower level, they administer an existing body of knowledge and ideology through their work in the educational system, cultural institutions and the media. (p. 177)

CRT is steeped in the works of the traditional critical theorists of the Frankfurt School and W. E. B. Du Bois who questioned not only the prevailing racial assumptions, but also the assumptions of racial study itself. In other words, he began to study the studier Gordon, 1999). Gordon concluded that at the heart of Du Bois critical race theory was a critique of theory itself.

CRT believes that in order to appreciate the perspective of oppressed racial minorities, the voice of a particular contributor must be understood in terms of the individual's own narrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In the current study, this researcher will use critical race theory consistent with the manner outlined by Delgado and Stefancic as a vehicle to get the voices of African American males to be heard and understood as they contribute to the narrative of their experience of success in the community college. Through the application of critical race theory as a component of this Appreciative Inquiry, this researcher will assist the participants in naming their own reality because "stories provide members of out-groups a vehicle for psychic self-preservation" (Delgado 1989).

Within CRT the experiences of minority students within the American educational system are brought into focus as the center of analysis. The perspectives of these marginalized student groups are called *counterstories* (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). The detailed experiences of marginalized students provide effective counterstories to the dominant cultural viewpoint of the American education system. These counterstories can play a critical role in providing a more holistic perspective on American education. Ladson-Billings (2000) asserts that these counterstories from the perspective of marginalized

student group members are “epistemologically valuable” in understanding American education practices in order to transform them (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Simply put, CRT creates a space where the stories of marginalized students can be heard and effectively used to inform education research and American education institutions (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000).

CRT explains many of the obstacles that are faced by African American males in their efforts to be academically successful in the community college. CRT identifies the critical components of the absence of academic success experienced by African American males and attributed them to racism, educational inequality, and institutional practices that adversely impact African Americans. African American males face a plethora of challenges on the road to academic achievement (Berry, 2001).

For the purposes of the current study, the researcher culled the component of *counterstories* from CRT and applied it to the theoretical framework. This perspective contrasts from past practices where the perspectives of African American males in higher education were overlooked or taken for granted when it came to research about their academic challenges, successes and development processes (Majors & Billson, 1992; Ross, 1998). Therefore, in addition to providing a space for African American male community college students to question the prevailing assumptions about their experience in the community college, the frame now also concerns itself with the concept that African American males can be the authors of the *counterstories* where their success is defined by them in their own words.

Critical Pedagogy

The third component of the theoretical frame is derived from Critical Pedagogy. Critical pedagogy argues that school practices need to be informed by a public philosophy that addresses how to construct ideological and institutional conditions in which the lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority of students becomes the defining feature of schooling (Giroux, 1997).

Critical pedagogy is perhaps best defined by Shor (1992) as:

habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional cliches, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse (p. 129).

The most influential actor in the twentieth century on the application of critical theory to education was Paulo Freire. In the seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1981) argued that education has been used to oppress people by not only teaching them their place in society, but by also teaching them to exist “inside a structure which made them *beings for others*” (p. 61). On the other hand, the same educational system that is used to oppress people can also be used to liberate them. Freire went on to say that “the solution is not to integrate them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become *beings for themselves*.” (p. 61). This concept of being for oneself is what Aronowitz (1998) called agency.

Snyder (2000) went further by utilizing agency as component of the operational definition of a theory of hope. Snyder's theory of hope was developed in relation to achieving one's goals. The theory has two components-- agency and pathways. Agency is described as the belief in one's capacity to initiate and sustain actions to reach a goal. Pathways relates to the belief in one's capacity to generate routes to reach goals. Although hope theory is not part of the theoretical frame for this study, the notions of agency and pathways are relevant in a conversation about African American males persisting in higher education because as Aronowitz (1998) put it, the role of the educator is "to encourage human agency, not mold it in the manner of Pygmalion" (Aronowitz 1998, p. 10).

Therefore, in addition to providing a space for African American male community college students to question the prevailing assumptions about their experience in the community college, and encouraging African American males to be the authors of the *counterstories* of their success, the theoretical frame of this study supports African American males to take control of their own destinies.

Appreciative Inquiry

Watkins and Mohr (2001, p. 36) describe the "DNA" or essential components of Appreciative Inquiry. They describe the theoretical framework of Appreciative Inquiry in terms of core principles that incorporate the beliefs and values inherent in this research method. Subsequently, they describe core processes to implement Appreciative Inquiry. Watkins and Mohr (2001) first identify three theoretical and research foundations of Appreciative Inquiry from

which the principles and processes of Appreciative Inquiry emerge. They cite social constructionism as one foundation, declaring that, “as the people of an organization create meaning through their dialogue together, they sow the seeds of the organization’s future” (p. 26). They also cite “the ‘new’ sciences (quantum physics, chaos theory, complexity theory, and self-organizing systems) and research on the power of image as theoretical and research foundations of Appreciative Inquiry.

Additionally, the DNA of Appreciative Inquiry includes the processes for actually implementing the methodology. Watkins and Mohr (2001, pp. 42-45) describe the “Four-D Model” of Appreciative Inquiry, which comprises a four-part cycle. The first stage is Discovery, where stakeholders engage in story-telling and sharing experiences of what has really worked well - appreciating and valuing the best of what is. The second stage is Dream - envisioning what might be. Participants craft a possibility statement or provocative proposition - a sort of vision statement to bridge the discovery of past examples of excellence, to the future dream of even greater excellence. The third stage is Design - dialoguing about what needs to be done to create an ideal organization to make the dream happen and attain greater excellence. Finally, the fourth stage is Deliver (sometimes called Destiny) – inviting action, co-constructing the future, developing the strategy and action plan to “deliver the goods,” so to speak.

Finally, Watkins and Mohr (2001), inspire hope for the potential of creating a ‘culture of success’ for African American male community college students, and

corroborate the suitability of Appreciative Inquiry as a philosophy and a methodology of research for this study, and for this researcher, with their words: Based on the belief that human systems are made and imagined by those who live and work within them, AI leads systems to move toward the generative and creative images that reside in their most positive core – values, visions, achievements, best practices (p. xvii-xviii).

The first component for the theoretical frame comes from Critical Theory, which encourages African American males to question the prevailing assumptions about their experience in the community college. Next, Critical Race Theory enables African American males to use *counternarratives* to create an empowered future for themselves. The third component comes from Critical Pedagogy and is the concept of human agency which is defined as “the capacities of people to take control of their own destinies” (Aronowitz, 1998, p. 10). In the current study, Critical Pedagogy empowers African American male community college students to restore a sense of Agency and take control of their destinies. Finally, the 4-D Process of Appreciative Inquiry provides the mechanism through which the previously silenced voices of African American males can be lifted. These components, when combined, may emerge as a new way of lifting voices from a disconnected population.

FOUR FACTOR FRAME	
<p>Critical Theory</p> <p>Encourages African American males to question the prevailing assumptions about their experience in the community college.</p>	<p>Critical Race Theory</p> <p>Enables African American males to use <i>counternarratives</i> to create an empowered future.</p>
<p>Critical Pedagogy</p> <p>Empowers African American male community college students to restore a sense of Agency and take control of their destinies.</p>	<p>Appreciative Inquiry</p> <p>Provides the mechanism through which the previously silenced voices of African American males can be lifted.</p>

Figure 1. Four Factor Frame: The components taken from Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Appreciative Inquiry, when combined create a four factor framework for lifting voices of African American male community college students.

Research Questions

The overarching research question in this study is: How do African American males define success? There are three supporting research questions guiding this study. They are:

1. How do African American males describe their experiences in the community college?
2. How do African American males describe the factors that contribute to their success?
3. How do African American males articulate the ideal conditions that promote their success?

For the purposes of this study, reality is defined as the African American male experience in community college and as such, the role played by critical theory during the Discovery Stage of AI was to encourage African American males to describe their experiences in the community college, including their challenges, successes and the resources that were supportive. Next, at the combined Dream/Design Stage of AI, critical race theory then provided the opportunity for African American males to use counter-narratives to identify the components that contributed to their moments of success. Finally, during the Destiny Stage of AI, critical pedagogy was employed to support African American males to take control of their own destinies (see Figure 2, below).

<i>THEORY</i>	<i>RESEARCH QUESTION</i>	<i>AI STAGE</i>
Critical Theory	How do African American males describe their experiences in the community college?	Discovery
Critical Race Theory	How do African American males describe the components that contribute to their success in the community college?	Dream/Design
Critical Pedagogy	How do African American males articulate the ideal conditions that promote their success?	Destiny

Figure 2. Query Linked to Theory: The research questions which emerged from each of the theories comprising the theoretical frame are applied to the corresponding stages of the 4-D Process in Appreciative Inquiry, thereby linking query to theory.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined operationally:

Achievement Gap—a term defined by Jencks and Phillips (1998) to indicate that "African Americans currently score lower than European Americans on vocabulary, reading, and mathematics tests, as well as on tests that claim to measure scholastic aptitude and intelligence. This gap appears before the children enter kindergarten, and persists into adulthood. It has narrowed since 1970, but the typical American black still scores below 75 percent of American whites on most standardized tests" (p. 1).

African American—a term used to describe individuals born in the United States who are of African descent. In this study, this term is often used interchangeably with the word "Black" (Jones, 2005).

Agency—the capacities of people to take control of their own destinies (Aronowitz, 1998, p. 10).

Cognitive Variables—are those that measure standardized intellectual ability and are exhibited by some numerical value. In this study, it includes the overall grade point average. The overall grade point average is calculated by dividing the number of credit hours by the quality points assigned to a grade (Jones, 2005).

Currently Engaged—was defined as full time enrollment for three consecutive semesters with a GPA of 2.0 or better.

Disadvantaged Students—students whose educational (i.e., high school grade point average, and SAT/ACT score) and economic background is considerably

lower than the traditional admission measures used for college students. This term is often used interchangeably with the term “at-risk student” (Jones, 2005).

Hegemony—the term derives from the Greek *hegemon*, meaning leader, prominent power or dominant state or person and is widely used to denote political dominance. A more specific and sophisticated concept of hegemony is elaborated by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* (1971). Gramsci’s notion of hegemony makes an important contribution to the theory of ideology . . . the state establishes and reproduces the dominance. The establishment of a hegemony is the task of the organic intellectuals of the ruling class. At the highest level, they create philosophy, the sciences and the arts; at a lower level, they administer an existing body of knowledge and ideology through their work in the educational system, cultural institutions and the media (Macey, 2000, p. 177).

Hope—Snyder’s theory of hope relates to achieving one’s goals. It consists of two interrelated cognitive components, referred to as agency and pathways. Agency is described as the belief in one’s capacity to initiate and sustain actions to reach a goal . . . while pathways can be described as the belief in one’s capacity to generate routes to reach goals (2000).

Involuntary Minority—“people who were originally brought into U.S. society more or less permanently against their will, through slavery, conquest, or colonization...Involuntary minorities develop an oppositional cultural frame of reference after their forced incorporation" (Ogbu, 1995, p. 203).

Non-Cognitive Variables—were defined as academic self-concept, integration to a campus, and commitment to gaining education (Hamilton, 2007).

Persistence—a term used to describe the process of commitment to complete the undergraduate degree. It is also a multidimensional phenomenon composed of academic, psychosocial, and demographic factors varying by institution, and continuously changes within student groups (Pascarella, 1986).

Social capital—the tangible benefits and resources that accrue to people by virtue of their inclusion in a social structure (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Social self-construction—according to Tyson (1999), social self-construction is "the process of forming contextualized self-understandings based on a variety of social information that we receive about ourselves" (p. 32) such as through our perceptions of self and others and our interactions with others.

Voluntary Minorities—are people who have moved to the U.S. more or less voluntarily because they believe that this move will result in more economic well-being, better overall opportunities and/or greater political freedom . . . Voluntary minorities bring with them cultural/language frames of reference that are different from, but not necessarily oppositional to, mainstream white American cultural/language frames of reference" (Ogbu, 1995, p. 202).

Assumptions and Limitations

With respect to assumptions and limitations, this study is guided by eight assumptions, yet has one limitation. The limitation of the study is that from the perspective of traditional research, it has both a small participant and institutional sample and as a result there will be limited ability to generalize from the results. However, Reed (2007) argued that larger, random samples do not mesh with Appreciative Inquiry. In Appreciative Inquiry, "this notion of sampling does not fit.

Samples in AI are not usually randomly generated; rather, strategic decisions are made about whom to invite to take part in a study” (p. 71).

Reed (2007) outlined the following eight assumptions that integrate Appreciative Inquiry into research:

(a) in every society, organization, or group, something works; (b) what we focus on becomes our reality; (c) reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities; (d) the act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way; (e) people have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known); (f) if we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past; (g) it is important to value differences; (h) the language we use creates our reality (p. 28).

As this study is an Appreciative Inquiry, then the eight assumptions of AI as they relate to the success of African American male community college students are the assumptions of this study.

Summary and Overview

This completes the description of the research opportunity and the context in which the study was conducted. Next it is appropriate to consider what the literature contributes to an understanding of the research question and the subject matter of this study. In Chapter 2, Review of Related Literature, I will draw upon research literature to develop a rationale for the study. I will illustrate both the importance of the proposed study and the lack of information on the

research problem. I will also provide an in-depth discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the study.

And what follows immediately is Chapter Two which presents an overview of the extant literature regarding African American male success in higher education and following that in Chapter Three is a discussion of the Appreciative Inquiry methods used to conduct the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The following is a literature review of the seminal works concerning the success of African American males in higher education. This review of the literature is delineated into four main categories. The first three categories present an overview of the extant literature relevant to this study which includes a discussion of the theoretical explanations of the educational experiences of African American males, the general experience of African American males in higher education, and the experience of African American males in community college. The literature review concludes with an overview of the theoretical framework that informs the study.

African American men are in a precarious position when it comes to persistence in higher education. The nationally declining numbers of African American males attending and graduating from colleges and universities are distressing. Researchers and educators are becoming increasingly concerned about the higher education participation rates of African American males (Roach, 2000). Current trends suggest that this plight will continue unless some critical intervention takes place on behalf of African American males. The following section will briefly discuss several of the most noted theoretical explanations of the African American male academic experience.

In *Redefining and Refining Scholarship for the Academy: Standing on the Shoulders of Our Elders and Giving Credence to African-American Voice and Agency*, Aldridge (2001) called for African-descended scholars in the 21st century

to revitalize the scholarly tradition forged by W. E. B. Dubois at the turn of the prior century. Rather than limit the conceptualization of black discourse as simply being a debate about alternative styles of response to white agendas, Aldridge encouraged African-descended scholars to take the lead in critical and emancipatory research that asserted African American voice and African American agency.

The African American Experience in Education

The tremendous challenges and obstacles African American males face in the pursuit of education have received increased research attention over the last decade (Allen-Meares, 1999; Irvine, 1990; Lipman, 1998; Ogbu, 1997; Steele, 1999). Several researchers have identified periods that prove to be critical in the educational experiences of African American males during which many of them face challenges to their ability to achieve academically. The inability to overcome these educational challenges subsequently influences their overall life opportunities and experiences (Harris, 1996; Hunt et al., 1994; Kunjufu, 1989; Lee, 1991; Parham & McDavis, 1987; Tatum, 1996). The challenges include, but are not limited to, educational marginalization (Fordham, 1996; Joseph, 1996), cultural incongruence (Kambon, 2003; Lipman, 1998; MacLeod, 1991; Ogbu, 1998; Viadero, 1996; Villegas, 1988), low teacher expectations (Hilliard, 1992; Kunjufu, 1989/2001; Rist, 1970), disparities in educational resources (Kozol, 1991), educational tracking (Oakes, 1985/1995; Page, 1991), disproportionate placement in special education (Joseph, 1996; Kunjufu, 2001; J. M. Patton, 1998; Walker & Sutherland, 1993), student resistance (Ogbu, 1978/1998), classroom

power dynamics (Apple, 1995; Delpit, 2006; Lipman, 1998), racism (Donaldson, 1996; Fulmore, Talor, Hom & Lyles, 1994; Weissglass, 2001), stereotype threat (Steele, 1999), lack of parental involvement (Clark, 1983; McAdoo & McAdoo, 1994), and lack of African American teacher role models (Hawkins, 1992; King, 1993; Taylor, 1989).

These barriers are some of the multitude of factors that impede African American males as they pursue educational aspirations. The extant research literature is full of references to conditions, syndromes and language that focus on the academic achievement difficulties of African American students in general, and African American males in particular. The terminology that maintains a deficit focus includes: developmental, special education, high risk, at-risk, culturally disadvantaged, under-prepared, ill prepared, economically disadvantaged, disengaged, endangered, unemployed, underemployed, oppositional, disabled, poor achievement and behavioral problems (Davis, 1999; Kunjufu, 2001; Lucky & Lucky, 1999; Osiris, 2005). Unfortunately this language labels African American males, starts very early in their academic experience, and follows them throughout their entire academic experience, including high school and beyond (Ryan, Lucky & Woods, 1996).

The majority of the research that focused on understanding the academic achievement of African Americans has been studies that compared African American student performance against the experiences of White American students. This approach has framed the research with a predisposition to view African Americans in a negative light (Fisher, 1999; Ford, 1995). The research

that compares African American children against White student norms, has frequently concluded that the low academic performance of African American students stems from multiple factors, including: locus of control (Stipek, 1993); oppositional identity (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986); need achievement (McClelland, 1992); aspirations (Cosby, 1971); and issues of self concept in general (Day-Vines, Patton & Baytops, 2003).

The extant research offers some plausible reasons for academic failure, but it does not go far enough to identify the factors that contribute to academic success of African American students. Previous research has tended to compare African American students from poor neighborhoods with upper and middle class White students. This type of analysis consistently has resulted in a negative perception of African Americans in general and of the academic motivation of African American children and young adults. The results of this type of inquiry were confounded by race, socioeconomic status and cultural fit (Fisher, 1999; Hilliard, 1992). Representative samples of African American students assume that these students are a homogenous group, all having identical predictors for academic success. The African American community is an internally complex and diverse community. Racism and discrimination affects each individual differently and this assumption will impede meaningful understanding of African American student academic experiences. Learning styles, beliefs, and attitudes necessary to achieve may be different for African Americans in various educational contexts than they are for members of other racial or ethnic groups (Bird, 1996; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Fisher, 1999; Ford & Harris, 1992).

Several researchers and educators focus exclusively on factors that influenced African American males in an attempt to explain their educational challenges and to correct the failures (Fisher, 1999; Kunjufu, 2001; Thomas, 1999). Explanations offered include limited teacher understanding with regard to the learning styles of African American children, low teacher expectations, lack of nurturing teachers, educational racial profiling, racism, lack of male teachers and role models, environmental pressures, socioeconomic issues, and limited parental involvement (Hilliard, 1992; Irvine, 1990; Kunjufu, 1986). Several other researchers, including Jawanza Kunjufu, Lisa Delpit, Claude Steele, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Molefi Asante, Theresa Perry and the late Asa Hilliard, have provided in-depth examination explaining the underachievement of African American males.

African American males who are non-compliant with the educational norms of the ethnic majority will be at risk for academic failure (Ogbu, 1990). Ogbu and Fordham (1986) concluded that the reaction of African American students in response to feelings of discrimination and oppression are central to their negative educational experiences and results in oppositional cultural identity. Further, the authors concluded that fictive kinship reinforced facets of Black identity. The authors defined fictive kinship as a strong sense of group loyalty among African American students through which students sanction one another for violating established norms of behavior. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) contended that by engaging in academically successful behaviors, African Americans risk being labeled as "acting White." The notion of "acting White"

grew in prominence as a potential explanation for African American lack of academic success (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991). The work of Ogbu has frequently received criticism and substantial notoriety. Although Ogbu's perspective has evolved over time, the basic premise had held constant (Ainsworth-Darnell, & Downey, 1998; Spradin, Welsh, & Hinson, 2000).

Ogbu (1990) concludes that there are two primary forces that influence the academic success or failure of African American males: 1) the status of their ethnic minority group membership and how that ethnic group assimilated into the society; and 2) the adaptive behaviors African American males utilize in response to discrimination and prejudice (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Spradin, Welsh & Hinson, 2000). At the core of the cultural-ecological model of Black academic Underachievement, Ogbu stated is the process by which ethnic minority groups adapt to the dominant cultural norms of the society. There are two categories for ethnic group status: voluntary and involuntary ethnic minorities (Ogbu, 1990). Voluntary minorities are ethnic groups whose ancestors came to the U.S. voluntarily in search of greater opportunities. On the other hand, ethnic groups whose ancestors were enslaved and subsequently denied full assimilation into the society are referred to as involuntary minorities (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Spradin, Welsh, & Hinson, 2000).

Members of minority groups classified as involuntary minorities develop defensive behaviors that tend to run counter to those that contribute to academic and success for voluntary ethnic minorities and members of the ethnic majority culture. Ogbu asserted that involuntary ethnic minorities are more apt to reject

behaviors, ways of thinking and paths to success that are attributable to the ethnic majority. Ogbu further concluded that compliant behaviors are equated with “selling out,” “acting White” or “not portraying an authentic self” (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Spradin, Welsh, & Hinson, 2000). African Americans, for the most part, having come to the United States through the peculiar institution of slavery are involuntary minorities.

The systematic prevention of African Americans from taking full advantage of the educational opportunities within the American educational system has long-range effects (Ogbu, 1990). As a result of being subjected to an inferior education that precludes or limits opportunities for higher education and high status occupations overall, African Americans continue to face tremendous odds. Consequently, African American students are more apt to reject educational achievement due to social and economic difficulties early in their educational experiences (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991).

Ogbu argued that as a result of generations of discrimination, racism and hopelessness faced by African Americans, many do not perform well academically in opposition to the mistreatment. African Americans adopt strategies for alternative achievement within a limited opportunity structure to cope with their anxiety about school achievement. These strategies most often lead to academic failure which limits or excludes African Americans from future opportunities (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991, Ogbu, 1990). African Americans, who in their distrust the values of the dominant culture, have developed behaviors and attitudes that are essentially incompatible with those required for school success.

Further, Ogbu concluded that by adopting various coping behaviors, involuntary ethnic minorities have, over time, tended to shape and distort community norms, values, and collective competencies. Ultimately, this created in a majority of African American males a solidified “oppositional identity” toward the U.S. ethnic majority’s culture and values. This identity is positive coping because it preserves racial identity and personal integrity, but on the other hand it is negative coping because it impedes possibilities of academic achievement. Not all African American males react to discrimination with the same responses. The variation in social class, different approaches to the preservation of self-esteem and varying styles of resolving conflict may explain these differences (Spradin, Welsh, & Hinson, 2000). Another African American adaptive response is called “cool posing.” Majors and Billson (1992) coined the term “cool pose” to explain a set of intentional language, style and behaviors, that act as a defense mechanism which ensures self-preservation for African American males in situations where they may feel a need to protect their pride, intellect, or manhood. The “cool pose” theory essentially is in agreement with Ogbu’s model of African American underachievement.

Most recently, Ogbu (2003) studied academic disengagement among African Americans in an affluent community in Ohio. The researcher concluded that African Americans in poor and affluent communities exhibit many of the same behaviors and attitudes that contribute to academic failure. The behaviors include lack of focus, academic disengagement, limited task orientation, low academic self-concept, and displaced explanations of academic failure. Ogbu

acknowledged the impact of structural racism and negative stereotyping on African American academic achievement, yet disagreed with assertions that these factors could fully explain the academic achievement gap between African Americans and White Americans (Harpalani & Gunn, 2003; Ogbu, 2003).

The theoretical explanations and analysis of African Americans and other ethnic minority group academic failure offered by Ogbu is frequently criticized for being too dependent on determinism and structuralism (Trueba, 1988). Ogbu made minimal effort to establish the causal relationships link between structural factors and the behavior of African American students (Erickson, 1987). Ogbu's narrow perspective on African American culture did not allow for broader understanding of African American behavioral responses to the dominant culture (Harpalani, 2002). Scholars frequently challenged Ogbu's oppositional identity theory and provide empirical research data in an effort to refute it (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Cook & Ludwig, 1997). Ogbu and Fordham did not go far enough in their effort to explain the notion of "acting White" among African American youth. The researchers could have made a greater effort to incorporate the issues of racial identity development and how it influences academic achievement (Harpalani & Gunn, 2003). Ogbu's attempt to address how African Americans develop strategies to succeed academically is based upon an initial faulty attempt to explain their lack of academic achievement.

Ogbu's research failed to account for the contextual factors within the school, home or community that may mitigate oppositional attitudes toward academic achievement. Although Ogbu is credited with increasing interests in

research on the academic achievement of African American students, the analysis presented by the researcher does little to explain what factors contribute to African Americans academic success. In addition, as the research was conducted on high school students, Ogbu's model does not directly apply to the conditions of African Americans in community college.

Fordham (1988) studied academically successful African American high-school students and concluded that academically successful students are constantly confronted with choosing between social acceptance by their peers or academic success. The peer group, with its "fictive kinship networks," Fordham contended, discourages students from pursuing adaptation to the dominant culture and subsequently academic success. Fictive kinship networks espouse values and preferences that operate in direct opposition to mainstream cultural values. The values of fictive kinships demonstrates racial unity among peers and operates as an oppositional response to mainstream American cultural values. Within this context, academically successful students must make a decision between loyalty to fictive kinship networks and adherence to dominant cultural values. Without many meaningful alternatives, academically successful students often adopt a "raceless persona" in order to succeed in predominantly white educational institutions (Day-Vines, Patton, & Baytops, 2003; Fordham, 1988). This decision often comes at a tremendous cost to African American students' sense of identity, ethnic group orientation and overall psychological well-being (Fordham, 1988).

Fordham's (1988) findings mirror the conclusions drawn in Ogbu's (1991) "oppositional identity" theory for explaining the absence of African American academic achievement. Unfortunately, neither Fordham's, nor Ogbu's theories offer explanations about why some African American students with strong racial identity and racial group identification can be academically successful. Students challenge the racial stereotypes and redefine what it means to be academically successful on a regular basis. The success of these students disputes the notion that all African American students have to decide between ethnic group acceptance and academic success. Recent research further dispels this notion of African American students having a cultural bias against academic achievement. The recent research suggests that African American students may develop an anti-academic achievement attitude over time in academic environments where in the most challenging and advanced academic courses they are significantly under represented (Kemp, 2004). In addition, the cultural opposition theories do not explain any within group differences that exist between African American males and females (Henderson & Milstien, 2002; Noguera, 2003; Sadowski, 2003).

African American Males in School

Cultural contradiction is the term used by Leake and Leake (1992) to explain the lack of academic achievement by African American males. They suggested that the educational conditions under which students expect to excel academically disaffirm their contemporary and historical experiences, language and culture. For example, the competitive and individualized nature of schooling

runs counter to African American home culture, which is more cooperative and collaborative. The inconsistency between of White American school culture and African American culture is the primary factor that promotes poor academic achievement of African American males and represents a cultural incongruence. Leake and Leake's theory fails to explain why some African American students succeed academically.

By recognizing the belief held by some educators that African Americans are intellectually deficient, the "conditioned failure model" goes further to explain African American male under achievement by recognizing the belief held by some educators. It is through this premise that the rationales for arguments are made for legitimizing the low expectations and limited teacher interactions that some teachers have with the African American male student. These notions encourage the self-fulfilling prophesy that African Americans are not capable of sustained levels of academic achievement. The student is ultimately blamed for their subsequent failure (Allen-Meares, 1999). This theory is grounded in teacher expectation as the explanation of African American academic difficulty. This model offers valuable insight towards gaining a greater understanding of the importance of teacher expectation on student academic success. Unfortunately, this theory does not provide an explanation for how other African American students are able to be successful despite low teacher expectations.

In contrast to the conditioned failure model, is Treisman (1985) who studied the issue of high academic failure rates of African American and Latino students in undergraduate calculus courses at University of California, Berkeley.

Treisman concluded that African-American calculus students were highly motivated; family supported and came to college with proven records of academic accomplishment. Treisman's research challenged the "mythology" that identified lack of motivation, lack of educational background, and lack of family emphasis on education as the rationale for the academic failure of African American students. Treisman concluded that the reason for African American student academic failure was based on their tendency to study in isolation. The benefits of collaborative learning strategies and the use of small group teaching methods which was practiced by other groups of students, was a practice that was unfamiliar to many African American students. Unfortunately, the study habits and academic strategies that produced success in high school turned out to be part of the problem once African American students got to college.

By comparing the academic behaviors of African American and Chinese students, Treisman concluded that Chinese students formed strong peer study groups that supported academic success. The Chinese peer study group members routinely assisted each other with homework problems, reviewed each other's work, and shared all manner of information related to their common interests and academic success. This collaboration provided the Chinese students with valuable support and opportunities to share knowledge to overcome obstacles to academic success. Treisman noted that these types of "learning communities" were a rarity among African American college students. African Americans tended to isolate themselves academically. Treisman concluded by building a supportive academic focused peer community among

highly motivated and previously successful African American students their chances for academic success tremendously increased (1985; 1992).

The critical point of academic departure for African American males is approximately the third and fourth grade (Morgan, 1980). African American males excelled at rates comparable to all other groups prior to this stage in their academic experience. Unfortunately, after the third or fourth grade, their achievement rates begin to spiral downward, which increases as they persist through their academic careers. Baker and Steiner (1996) agreed and stated that the longer black students in school, the more they fell behind. Morgan further concluded the primary reason for the change was that by the fourth grade the classroom shifts from a social, cooperative, and interactive environment to an individualistic, competitive and a minimally interactive place to learn.

Kunjufu (1995) corroborates Morgan's finding regarding this fourth grade phenomenon. Kunjufu labeled this the "Fourth Grade Syndrome." The author further asserted that African American males are at particular risk during this period if they are not involved in some form of team oriented cooperative sports, skill development (such as martial arts), or do not come from a home environment where academic achievement is emphasized and highly valued. Kunjufu (1984) primarily attributes the lack of male academic achievement to incompetent and insensitive teachers, too few male teacher role models, parental apathy, increased influence of peer group, and the negative influence of over exposure to television and other forms of mass media (Allen-Meares, 1999). The work of Kunjufu has been very insightful in deconstructing the reasons for African

American failure in American schools. The author also develops steps by which teachers can promote the achievement of African American males. Kunjufu's work is very important with regard to the academic challenges of elementary and high school African American males, but does not explore the factors that contribute to academic success for African American men in higher education.

There is a "culture of power" which exists in classrooms and other academic settings and understanding it is useful in a conversation about African American male underachievement (Delpit, 2006). Delpit suggests that those who hold or have access to power are oblivious to the privileged position their ethnic status affords them. McIntosh (2001) refers to this as the invisible knapsack of White privilege. The dominant ethnic group understands the unspoken rules and cultural cues to access opportunities and rewards. African American males have trouble when they do not know the rules or are not aware of the cultural cues and the appropriate behavioral responses to be successful. The conclusion is that African American males struggle in these academic environments because they have not gained access to the cultural knowledge and norms necessary for success within the culture of power (dominant ethnic group) (Allen-Meares, 1999). Delpit's conceptualization of the "culture of power" based on the structure of elementary schooling provided insights. However, the fundamental issues that influence African American students' ability to access cultural knowledge throughout the schooling process can have considerable implications for students in higher education who are responsive to effective guidance and mentoring.

Davis and Jordan (1994) explored the impact that the school structure and context have on African American male achievement. They concluded that African American males generally perform better academically in suburban or rural schools. Students who attended urban schools were most often less engaged in learning than their suburban or rural counterparts. Urban school settings did not seem to promote the environment these students needed in order to be academically successful. Davis and Jordan concluded that small cooperative academic settings are best suited for high levels of academic achievement in African American males (Allen-Meares, 1999).

Tobias (1989) concluded similarly to Davis and Jordan (1994), but went one step further. The researcher condemned urban school settings as being ineffective and stated that they were not conducive to the academic achievement of any students, particularly African Americans. He asserts that the contemporary challenges urban schools face (i.e. irrelevant curriculum, teacher incompetence, lack of parental involvement, ineffective guidance and counseling, violence, etc.) are extremely detrimental to the educational outcomes of African American children. These conditions can and often do affect males more acutely (Allen-Meares, 1999; Kunjufu, 1984/2001). The conditions in which these students are educated might play a critical role in the lack of academic success of African American males in higher education. This research does not explore the connections between secondary preparation and later academic performance.

Allen-Meares (1999) and Oyserman, Gant, & Ager (1995) concluded that the African American males underachieve because of the dynamic

interdependency of identity and environmental possibilities. They explore the notion that the social construction of self is critically dependent on environmental possibilities, support from others, and the other environmental challenges and support found in the individual's immediate social environment. The opportunities, people and circumstances in an African American male's immediate environment greatly influence the possible roles and goals that he perceives as viable or attainable. The influences can include but are not limited to school, church, peer group, family, community, mass media and the larger influences of "hip hop" culture (Kunjufu, 1995, 2001). The research highlights important issues relating to the social construction of self and students' abilities to connect to environmental support systems. Unfortunately, these conclusions fail to explain how some students are able to adjust and achieve academically despite the absence of critical systems of support. Although the above research is not focused on African American males in the community college, it provides insight into the nature of support systems for African American male academic success.

Frequently African American males experience a contextual social environment that neither nurtures nor supports a positive construction of self in a "healthy" way and it does not support a construction of self that is amicable to successful negotiation in the larger society (Taylor, 1994). Challenges African American males face in addressing the realities of a "socially constructed self" that has been defined by the larger society based on negative racial and cultural notions further complicate issues of identity construction. A "socially constructed"

definition of what it means to be a man in American society and a “contextual self” that is shaped and defined by urban contemporary African American notions of manhood and masculinity can create enormous personal conflict in the lives of young African American men (Allen-Meares, 1999; Kunjufu, 1984; Oyserman, Gant & Ager, 1995; Wilson, 1992). From this theoretical perspective, African American males have the arduous task of negotiating and adjusting to the norms and values of at least three relatively distinct, but dynamically interrelated, cultures to be academically successful; American male culture, African American culture, and urban American culture (Locke, 1999). The balanced integration of this “triple consciousness” into the African American males’ overall psyche is necessary for academic achievement and overall life success.

Rosenberg (1989) explained that without reference to the “subjective world of the actors” individual behavior is very difficult to understand. This theoretical perspective requires a shift from an objective to a subjective frame of reference. Rosenberg (1989) postulates that behavior is not regulated exclusively by the world that exists but by the world that the individual perceives. These perceptions are of critical importance to how the person will react and negotiate situations. Individuals tend to view themselves not so much in comparison to other groups but in relation to “comparable others.” This perspective suggests that African American males who reside and go to school in predominantly White communities or institutions may experience considerably more negative perceptions of self than those who live and attend school in predominantly African American communities. Although the former tend to perform slightly

better academically, the latter generally possess a higher self-concept.

Rosenberg (1989) ultimately surmised that actual and perceived forms of racism, prejudice and discrimination in their educational experiences adversely affect both groups. Rosenberg's research did not examine academic outcomes for African American students. However, he does explore the impact racism and discrimination can play in the educational experiences of African American males.

A particularly important factor in the level of academic difficulty experienced by African American males is the issue of racism in schools (Kunjufu, 2001; Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976; Weissglass, 2001; White & Cones, 2000). Weissglass (2001) stated that racism is the systematic mistreatment of people based on certain phenotypic traits. According to Weissglass, people and institutions conditioned to act, consciously and unconsciously, in harmful ways toward "people of color promulgate this systemic mistreatment." Weissglass (2001) suggest that institutional racism in educational policies and practices disadvantages African American students and other ethnic minority groups. The American education system promotes disproportionate resource allotment and unequal learning opportunities based on race and social status (Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003). If the academic outcomes are to improve for ethnic minority and low income children, significant reforms must take place in our educational system. The attention given to strategies that promote African American academic success in elementary or post secondary academic settings is very limited.

Spradin, Welsh, & Hinson (2000) concluded that the explanation for African American male underachievement is rooted in an examination of how the “educational social system” influences learning outcomes. The researchers found that the racial composition of classroom students is more highly correlated with achievement and climate variables than were economic indicators of family income. In other words, the more culturally diverse the student population in a classroom or school the greater the possibility for African American male academic achievement. The researchers speculated the presence of middle class white children in a diverse classroom would also mean the presence of greater school and community resources. More specifically, they found that African American males can possess high levels of academic self-concept while simultaneously performing poorly academically.

The researchers concluded that, frequently African American males believe that they have the ability to achieve academically, but perceive that forces within the educational system conspire to promote their failure. (Gregory, 2000; Spradlin, Welsh, & Hinson, 2000). This research is important in that it speaks to issues of academic self-concept, internal and external locus of control, and access to academic resources during elementary and secondary schooling. How these variables impact higher education performance has provided limited insights (Polite & Davis, 1999; Price, 2000).

Several researchers consider racial identity development and racial identification as the major influence on academic achievement for African

Americans in general and males in particular (Cross, 1991; Fordham, 1988; Spradlin, Welsh, & Hinson, 2000). Spradlin, Welsh, and Hinson (2000) found that African American males with the highest levels of racial identity awareness tended to have the lowest overall records of academic achievement. The researchers defined racial identity awareness as students that had pride in their ethnic identity, knowledge of African American history, and some fundamental understanding of racism. This research corroborates the research on oppositional identity and its impact on academic performance (Ogbu, 1998). However, some scholars have found that high levels of racial identity awareness correlate with high academic performance for students (Kambon, 2003; Kunjufu, 1984). More research to inform African American males' academic experiences in higher education with regard to racial identity awareness and academic performance could be helpful.

Studies that examine cross-racial issues provided some illumination insight into the academic underachievement of African American males (Fisher, 2000). Research in this area has often involved presumably representative samples of African Americans and White students. Typically, this has meant comparing African Americans from low socioeconomic status backgrounds (SES) and White Americans from "middle class" communities. The faulty premise that African American and White American student groups are homogenous and have the same indicators for academic success or failure regardless of differential factors such as SES is the foundation of much of this research. When factors, such as, SES, race, academic culture and prior educational experiences are

considered, it makes these groups very difficult to compare with any substantive validity for African Americans (Fisher, 2000).

African American males are prone to academic failure when they do not develop an ideology of self empowerment that helps them to overcome limiting school practices (Delpit, 2006; Donald, 1996; Fagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Tucker, 1999). These authors suggest that an ideology of self empowerment is critical for African American male academic success because it helps them to learn how to confidently navigate the academic environment and create a space for their own development and positive academic self concept. African American students with a strong ideology of self-empowerment develop strategies to overcome limitations to succeed academically (Berry, 2001; Tucker, 1999).

Tucker (1999) conducted research with over 600 families and developed a Self Empowerment Theory of Achievement (SETA). From this research, Tucker concluded that it is critical for African American students to adopt personality attributes that contribute to self empowerment, such as high self-motivation, internal locus of control, flexible and adaptive skills, high self-esteem, and consistent involvement in behaviors that lead to academic success. Tucker believed that there is a clear relationship between behaviors and academic success for African American students. African American cultural orientations inappropriately labeled in predominantly White academic settings can have detrimental outcomes. Thus, African American students must develop academic and socialization skills that promote their success in these environments. Tucker's findings contrast with Ogbu's model of oppositional identity. Under the

Ogbu model, the positive adaptive academic and social skills are deemed “acting White”. For academic success to be sustained and purposeful, these skills must be skills imperative to academic success (Berry, 2001; Tucker, 1999). Some examples of socialization skills include overcoming negative peer pressure, effectively managing conflict, time management, choosing academically successful friends, dealing effectively with short-term failure, and making positive connections with potential role models. Tucker’s model underscores the importance of positive role models. Positive role models can help students rejuvenate themselves when faced with perceived insurmountable challenges.

Social context has also been identified as a crucial factor as it impacts on the degree to which students perceive academic self empowerment which in turn influences their level of academic success (Berry, 2001). When African American students are empowered, they are more apt to achieve academic success. Tucker postulates that this theory of African American academic success can mediate in situations where discrimination is present and teacher and parent support are limited. Tucker’s model can provide clarity into how students from impoverished backgrounds with limited academic and social support achieve academic success (Berry, 2001).

Consistent with the notion of self-empowerment discussed above is the Theory of Hope as defined by Snyder (2000). Snyder’s theory of hope was developed in relation to achieving one’s goals. The theory has two components—agency and pathways. Agency is described as the belief in one’s capacity to initiate and sustain actions to reach the goal. Pathways relates to the

belief in one's capacity to generate routes to reach goals. Although hope theory is not part of the theoretical frame for this study, the notions of agency and pathways are relevant in a conversation about African American males persisting in higher education.

African American Males in Higher Education

Shortcomings in high schools mean that an unacceptable number of college students must take costly remedial classes as problems in the K-12 system do not simply end at the twelfth grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Increasingly students arrive at college who are not sufficiently prepared to do college level work and some colleges pass on the problem. "Over the past decade, literacy among college graduates has actually declined...some never complete their degrees at all, at least in part because most colleges and universities don't accept responsibility for making sure that those they admit actually succeed" (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

If college degree attainment is the barometer by which we measure success in higher education, African American males as a group are engaged in a tremendous cycle of educational failure (Gregory, 2000; Polite & Davis, 1999). In this section of the literature review, the author used a critical lens to *question the prevailing assumptions about reality* that were inherent in the theoretical approaches used in the existing research that attempted to explain the lack of African American academic success at various levels in the American educational system.

Currently, African American men account for 3.5% of college and university enrollments nationwide (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998; Davis, 1999). The low numbers of African American males who attend higher education further complicate a comprehensive understanding of the impact of their attrition rates. So many factors affect their educational experiences that it is difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of their educational struggles as a group (Allen-Meares, 1999; Blake & Darling, 1994; Bryant, 2000). The difficulties are even more challenging to identify when the relative success of their female counterparts in higher education participation is considered. African Americans have the lowest male-female ratio of all ethnic minority populations (Jones, 2001). In some universities and colleges, African American women outnumber men by a three to one ratio (Bryant, 2000; Jones, 2001; Slater, 1994). In 2000, less than one-third (27.3%) of the African American men who graduated from American high schools matriculated to an institution of higher education. This is a decline from 34.4% in 1990, 32.2% in 1991, 29.7% in 1992 and 28.4% in 1998 (Davis, 1994; Jones, 2001). African American male higher education participation and academic success are on a perpetual downward spiral (Allen-Meares, 1999; Davis, 1999; Irvine, 1990; Stewart, 1992). African American males who do manage to gain access to higher education run a significant risk of failing to reach degree completion (Brown, 1999; Cuyjet, 1997).

Each of the discussed theoretical explanations of the lack of academic achievement may provide some understanding of the educational crisis faced by African American men. However, none of the theories independently provides a

clear picture or potential solution to the challenges that African American males confront at all levels of the educational system, particularly in pursuit of higher education. More research will provide greater insight into the educational issues related to African American males academic success (Bird, 1996; Cuyjet, 1997; Roach, 2001; Thomas, 1999).

Generally relegated to explorations of the quantitative indicators of enrollment and attrition, research on African American males in U.S. higher education needs broader exploration (Cuyjet, 2006; Cuyjet, 1997; Osiris, 2005; Tinto, 1993). In contrast, there is limited information about the qualitative experience of these male students (Majors & Billson, 1992; Ross, 1998). Given the potential impact school experiences have on social and economic consequences throughout the life cycle, how African American males cope with the stresses of these environments and manage to achieve academically merits important consideration (Roach, 2001). Higher education settings provide a useful context to examine the influence of such factors on academic outcomes, both within and beyond the bounds of university life (Cuyjet, 1997).

Research on African Americans in higher education consistently incorporates conversations about campus environments, racial identity development, and how economic status influence the educational experiences of college students (Fleming, 1984; Irvine, 1990). In particular, campus social environments influence the differential educational outcomes for African American college students (Allen, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Institutional support and racial identity formation have been two key factors studied to explore how they

relate to academic achievement in higher education (Nettles, 1987). While institutional support has significant consequences for educational outcomes, knowledge is limited about the differential experiences of African American males in college and their perceptions of critical factors that contribute to their ability to achieve academically (Irvine, 1990; Majors & Billson, 1992; Roach, 2001).

In order to gain a better understanding and to explore college participation rates as well as the levels of academic success for African Americans and other underrepresented ethnic groups, social and cultural capital research is helpful (Delpit, 1995; Freeman, 1997; Masey et. al., 2002; McDonough, 1997). In the book, *The Source of the River: The Social Origins of Freshmen at America's Selective Colleges and Universities*, Massey, Charles, Lundy and Fisher (2002) provide a clear operational definition of social and cultural capital and how the lack thereof can impact the educational opportunities of African Americans and other underrepresented ethnic groups:

Social capital: the tangible benefits and resources that accrue to people by virtue of their inclusion in a social structure (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). People gain access to social capital through membership in networks and institutions and then convert it into other forms of capital (such as education) to improve or maintain their position in society (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman, 1990). Children connected through ties of kinship or friendship to people who can help them prepare for college – socially, psychologically, culturally, and academically – those ties can constitute a source of social capital. Finally, cultural capital refers to

knowledge of norms, styles, conventions, and tastes that pervade specific social settings and allow individuals to navigate them in ways that increase their odds of success. This concept originated in the work of Max Weber, but gained special prominence in the work of Bourdieu (1977), who argued that cultural information passed on informally from one generation to the next helps to perpetuate social stratification. Wealthy children inherit a substantially different body of cultural knowledge compared with working-class children, especially when the latter are members of a racial or ethnic minority. School systems are organized such that the cultural knowledge of middle-class whites is valorized and systematically rewarded, whereas, the cultural capital possessed by the lower class minorities is not. (p.6)

Social or cultural capital factors might include the behaviors, attitudes, knowledge, possessions, and credentials that function as informal academic standards. For example, those who lack this cultural capital may: 1) have stunted educational expectations due to lack of awareness of cultural directives toward educational achievement; 2) work diligently to compensate for lack of social or cultural capital; or 3) receive less encouragement and support for their educational investment (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Cultural capital, or lack thereof, can play a critical role in the value of attaining or the perceived ability to attain a college degree, as well as the information available about successful negotiation of the college environment in order to be academically successful. This theory suggests that the primary explanation for African American male

underachievement in higher education stems from the lack of social and cultural capital African Americans possess in the United States. However, this theory does not explain why African American women have been more successful than African American men in academic achievement under similar conditions.

Perry (1993) offers a theory on African American academic success which presents a compelling argument. Perry argues that in order for students to be academically successful in predominantly White academic environments, successful engagement with at least three different communities is critical. The three communities or groups that the author believes to be important are engagement with a group that has dealt with oppression and discrimination (typically their own ethnic group), some degree of engagement with the dominant group system, and engagement with a cultural group which offers an alternative to White dominant cultural values (Berry, 2001). Boykin and Toms (1985) referred to this as the “triple quandary” that African American students must overcome in order to be academically successful. Engagement with each group offers African American students certain necessary knowledge and skills to promote academic success.

Membership in a group that has experienced racism and oppression in the U.S. will help the students to be prepared to navigate the pitfalls of racism and discrimination that they will confront throughout their academic careers. At an early age, presumably parents and close relatives teach the skills and knowledge to combat racism. Engagement in the dominant cultural system is critical because, in this context, African American students learn coping skills and to

understand White values, tastes, perceptions of the world, habits and ways of being. Familiarity with these values is essential to gain access to cultural capital and the culture of power in the United States. It is critical for students to learn the explicit and implicit rules for successful participation in educational environments where the culture of power is different from their own cultural values. Perry's theory coincides with Delpit's (2006) theory of the culture of power in this regard. According to Thompson and O'Quinn (2001), the fundamental values of White middle class culture permeate American school culture (Berry, 2001). Therefore, African American students must learn to function according to certain norms, speech patterns, writing, dressing and interacting that are acceptable to White middle class culture.

African American student academic success depends on the student being comfortable in multiple cultures and being able to move between them (Perry, 1993). Typically, educational institutions have disregarded the importance of cultural adaptability as an important contributing factor for academic success (Berry, 2001; Perry, 1993). African American students who develop adaptive skills and strategies across cultural frames are more apt to be academically successful. In contrast, those students who have difficulty navigating between cultural frames will likely experience academic difficulty (Berry, 2001; Perry, 1993).

African American students are most successful in an environment that appreciates and acknowledges their socio-cultural life experiences (Perry, 1993). Educational institutions, therefore need to find ways of incorporating and

validating African American culture. The author stresses that, for African American students to be academically successful, they must accept the dual responsibility of navigating the dominant cultural values and maintaining a strong sense of their own cultural identity (Berry, 2001). Perry's theory offers some very compelling insights. However, the author does not delineate any specific skills or strategies that African American students should deploy to ensure academic success.

Stereotype threat is the basis for much of the academic struggles African American students confront (Steele, 1999). The theory of stereotype threat claims that the underachievement of African Americans and other underrepresented groups is a result of the psychological trauma and unconscious fear of confirming negative stereotypes of their ethnic groups' intellectual ability. If the stereotype threat is pervasive, it can significantly impact academic performance, and thus, long term stereotype threat exposure can encourage students to disassociate themselves from high academic performance as a defensive mechanism.

There are three fundamental assumptions that undergird stereotype threat: 1) all people are motivated to think well of themselves and encourage others to share in this perception; 2) the psychological and social trauma of possibly performing poorly in a given situation and thus confirming negative stereotypes of your ethnic group increase the likelihood of poor academic performance; 3) disidentification (psychological disengagement) with the situation is a long-term outcome of extended exposure to this threat (Massey,

Charles, Lundy, & Fisher, 2002). African American males, in order to reduce exposure to this psychological trauma, may choose to disconnect their healthy sense of self from academic performance. If this occurs, poor academic performance would not jeopardize self-esteem. If this persists over time, they might ultimately disassociate themselves from academic success all together.

When students decide to leave an institution of higher education is considered by the institution as academic failure. However, Tinto (1993) offers a theory of student departure which presents an alternate way of looking at why African American males drop out of higher education prior to graduation. Tinto's model explores the student's own perception of his or her own integration into the academic and social systems of the campus community. This is one of the few studies that actually examine student perceptions of their own academic process. Tinto explained that levels of cultural incongruence between the student and the institution influences college attrition rates. College students who perceive that their personal values, norms, ideas and preferences are incongruent with the institutions' are less likely to become appropriately integrated into the social and academic culture of the institution. Tinto (1993) defined social integration as the informal connections to peers, faculty, and staff that occur largely outside the formal process of education. Academic integration includes connection to particular areas of study, courses taken, and formal relationships with faculty and overall satisfaction with academic experiences. Students that are not socially and academically integrated into the institution usually do not continue to matriculate.

In Tinto's (1993) theory, African American students confront challenges

and obstacles that make academic and social integration increasingly difficult at traditionally white institutions (TWI). Many African American cultural values and social norms are incongruent with the social life at TWIs. This incongruence makes it difficult for students to find supportive communities within these institutions. When African Americans are not able to find support in the academic environment, it can adversely affect their overall academic performance (Jones, 2001). Tinto (1993) found that African Americans most often utilized cultural students' organizations as the means by which they were able to begin the process of social integration into the campus community. The findings of several scholars, such as Bird (1996), DeSousa & Kuh, (1996) and Fleming (1984), confirm the importance of cultural organizations, fraternities and sororities to African American student retention and matriculation.

Additionally, Ross (1998) conducted ethnographic research to identify factors that contributed to the academic success of African American males at HBCUs. The results of this research identified factors that promote academic success among African American males throughout their academic experiences. Ross interviewed 34 African American males who were members of a campus organization developed to promote continued academic success among African American males with a 3.0 or higher grade point average. Ross found that intentional support was a prominent factor in African American male academic success. Other important factors were survival skills, bonding and caring with significant others, and making good decisions (Berry, 2002).

Success Factors

Critical Race theory introduced the notion that silenced voices should be inserted into the discourse on African American males in education thereby helping to shift the emphasis of the research from a recent increase in its focus on the academic failures of African American men in institutions of higher education to include perspectives that focus on their success. However, less research exists that identifies and understands the factors that promote academic success for this student population (Allen-Meares & Davis, 1999; Gregory, 2000). In a special issue of *Black Issues in Higher Education*, (Roach, 2001) made a vehement plea for scholars to engage in more research identifying key factors that contribute to African American male success. Hamilton (2007) concluded that the practice of focusing on the deficits simply perpetuated the momentum of continuing to focus on the deficits:

This deficit perspective focuses on the group's weaknesses and societal barriers. For this reason, scholars who have used a deficit perspective have guided the majority of literature and studies to examine the negative aspects of African American men's experiences, rather than the successes. Categories such as homelessness, violence, homicide, suicide, incarceration, and dropping out of school tend to flood the literature. Representation of African American men in research that provides anecdotes of success and perseverance are scarce (p. 183).

In Black Men: Obsolete, Single, and Dangerous? Madhubuti (1990) asserted that despite the literature that emphasizes the negative perceptions of

Black men and depicts them as being in a state of crisis, there are great numbers of Black men who have withstood grave conditions to persist to success.

African American males must reframe the issues affecting them in college and move from a model that regards (and perpetuates) them as victims to one that focuses on their success (Harris, 1996; Hamilton, 2007). In order to do so, they must have the opportunity to view themselves as successful (Harris, 1996). Hall and Rowan (2001) concluded that it is not the African American male who is failing to persist in higher education, but it is higher education that is failing to provide a learning environment that is conducive to the needs of African American males.

Kincaid (2003) described negative environments and a lack of personal confidence and motivation as detrimental influences on academic success, and strong human support systems as positive influences on academic success. Cuyjet (2006), on the other hand, suggested participation in extracurricular activities could create a positive social climate that can be important for the academic success of African American males and examined the advantages of developing communication and leadership skills. He posited that fostering relationships with administrators and community leaders could promote academic success. He also described a proven mentoring program and examined the role spirituality and religion can play in bolstering successful college experiences.

Recent research (Cuyjet, 2006, 1997; Hamilton, 2007; Harper, 2004; Howard-Hamilton, 1997; Hrabowski, Maton, & Grief, 1998; Hrabowski & Pearson,

1993; Johnson, 1993; Moore, Flowers, Guion, Zhang, & Staten, 2004; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). Hamilton (2007) contended that although African Americans have made some tremendous gains, “African American men have been overrepresented in literature that espouses a ‘deficit’ perspective and...academia is overwhelmed with studies that indicate the plight or absence of African American men in higher education” (2007, p. 180). Hamilton concluded that the distorted representation of African American men has an impact on the performance, retention and persistence of individuals within the group.

Studies that do focus on the success of African American males focus on the factors that promote academic success for African American males in college (Bush & Bush, 2005; Cuyjet, 2006; Flowers, 2006; Johnson, 1993; Kincaid, 2003; Morgan-Gardner, 2004; Perry-Johnson, 2003; Pope, 2002; Reglin, 1994), and retention of African American males in college (Ammons, 2006; Hagedorn et al., 2001/2002; Hampton, 2002).

With respect to measuring success, Hamilton (2007) contrasted between the cognitive and non-cognitive variables and linked success, retention, and persistence with non-cognitive variables. Hamilton defined cognitive variable as: “variables related to students’ academic achievement or performance as predictors of graduation (GPA, SAT and ACT scores and class rank). Non-cognitive variables were defined as academic self-concept, integration to a campus, and commitment to gaining education” (2007, p. 186).

Morgan-Gardner (2004) determined that racial identity development was a salient factor in the social interaction process for Black students seeking out

teachers, counselors, or advisors whose social ideology and culture related to their beliefs and values” (p. 124). On the other hand, Pope (2005) asserted that Black students are often confronted with many issues that are unfavorable to their retention and success while in college...and made the case for creating a campus climate that promotes success of African American males.

In contrast, Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton (2001, 2002) concluded that it is a combination of both cognitive and non-cognitive factors that promoted retention of African American males through the first, second, and third semesters including: (1) the importance of their high school grades; (2) number of courses enrolled; (3) a positive view of personal skills; (4) clear high goals; and (5) the early identification of a college major. According to the authors, these factors are salient to this population.

In addition, Ammons (2006) was less focused on predictions of retention and more focused on identifying best practices that establish a climate for successful retention. Ammons provided the following recommendations and best practices for retaining African American males in college: (1) the creation of rites of passage programs, (2) all male academies, (3) identifying African American male mentors, (4) early career exploration, and (5) the fusion of Afro-cultural teaching pedagogy. Cuyjet (2006) concluded that initiatives aimed at encouraging more African American males to attend college and increasing their participation and retention, including mentoring initiatives and summer bridge programs, have proven successful in enhancing African American males college preparation, and reducing the high school attrition rate.

Non-cognitive variables were found to be critical in determining academic success for African American students (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976). The researchers concluded that African American students who lack competency in any of these areas may be at risk academically. They proposed eight factors that relate to African American student academic success at four-year institutions. The eight dimensions are: 1) positive self-concept, 2) realistic self-appraisal, 3) the ability to understand and deal with racism, 4) preference for long-range goals over more immediate, short-term needs, 5) the accessibility and availability of a strong support person and/or support system, 6) the ability to understand and successfully navigate the system, 7) successful leadership experience, and 8) demonstrated community service. Tracey and Sedlacek (1986) examined these same dimensions and added a ninth on academic familiarity with respect to both grades and persistence. The researchers concluded that there was strong support for the variables in predicting persistence and academic success for African American students. These variables were highly correlated to college persistence. To a lesser degree, Tracey and Sedlacek found non-cognitive variables related to persistence for white students. Further, Tracey and Sedlacek found that different non-cognitive dimensions correlated to academic success for African Americans at different points in their collegiate experiences. Early African American student persistence related to having strong support for educational aspirations, and a preference for long-range goals, as well as to having realistic self-appraisal and positive self-concept. These factors related to persistence throughout the entire collegiate experience. An ability to understand and deal

with racism and demonstrated community service were good indicators of persistence and academic success (Sedlacek, 1987; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985, 1986, 1987).

For the past half century, research concerning the relationship between non-cognitive variables and academic success has existed. However, the research only covered certain non-cognitive variables including social interaction and leadership, for example, were researched (Fredericksen, 1954; Wilson, 1955). As the research suggests, non-cognitive variables may offer critical insights into the academic performance and persistence of African American males. This is strong evidence for colleges and universities to consider in addition to the cognitive predictors typically used in college admission and promotion of academic success for students. This suggests that students demonstrate intelligence in at least three forms: analytical intelligence, experiential intelligence, and contextual intelligence (Sedlacek, 1996; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987). Non-cognitive variable research suggests that African Americans tend to score higher on evaluations that assess experiential and contextual intelligence as well as analytical intelligence (Sedlacek, 1996).

African American students tend to develop high levels of experiential and contextual intelligence in order to succeed. People who experience racism and discrimination develop skills that help them to negotiate a system not designed for their advancement. As a result, African Americans may utilize experiential, contextual, and analytical intelligence to achieve academic success (Sedlacek, 1996).

To a limited degree, the above research offers some explanations about why African American males fail to achieve academic success. Unfortunately, these explanations fall short of providing a clear explanation of, or identification of the factors that contribute to academic success in African American males in the community college. Studying what causes academic failure does not fully illuminate the process for promoting success. It is only by studying African American males who experience academic success, that scholars will garner additional information regarding the success factors for African American male success (Osiris, 2005).

The above sections focused on the experiences of African American males in four-year institutions. The findings demonstrated through the previous research may not be directly applicable to African American males in two year institutions. The following section will speak specifically to the experience of African American males in the American community college system.

African American Males in Community Colleges

While previous studies have focused on African Americans in higher education, fewer studies have focused specifically on the plight of the African American male and the factors that influence persistence of African American males attending American community colleges (Bush & Bush, 2005; Hagedorn et al., 2001, 2002; Hampton, 2002; Holzman, 2006). Large numbers of beginning postsecondary students attend public 4-year institutions, yet a significant and larger number of first year students attend public 2-year institutions (Horn, Peter, & Rooney, 2002). Community colleges have always been the port of entry into

the world of higher education (Hamilton, 2007; Lewis & Middleton, 2003). There are disparities in student outcomes at community colleges and “many community college students are the students who were least well served by their previous education and therefore have the greatest need” (Achieving the Dream, 2006).

Williamson and Creamer (1988) found that the factors influencing persistence in higher education differ for two-year college students and four-year college students. These findings suggest that perhaps background characteristics (e.g., race and gender) exert a considerable influence on students’ persistence decisions. African American undergraduate males who made up thirty-seven percent of all African American undergraduate students in 2000 constituted approximately 12 percent of all male students attending two-year institutions (Horn, Peter, & Rooney, 2002).

Hampton (2002) studied best practices for addressing retention in an urban community college. Hampton identified family as a very strong motivator in African American males’ decisions to attend college, but also indicated that family, along with employment, and other responsibilities which increase with age, tend to serve as detractors from the community college experience for African American males.

Winbush (2001) neither focused specifically on community colleges, nor on a college age population, however, the recommendations made in *The Warrior Method: A Parents’ Guide to Rearing Healthy Black Boys* has implications for both. In *The Warrior Method*, Winbush suggested that the non-cognitive factors influencing the success of African American males in college

includes mentoring that: (a) prepares them financially; (b) provides tours of Historically Black Colleges and Universities; (c) guides them through the testing and application process; and (d) monitors the advice given to African American males by high school guidance counselors.

Several key researchers have begun to make the case for developing pedagogy that is more appreciative of the distinct learning styles of African American learners in the community college (McKusick & I.P. McPhail 2003; McPhail & McPhail, 1999) and the necessary training for those who teach African American learners (C.J. McPhail & Costner, 2004).

McPhail and McPhail (1999) concluded that the principle issue is that African Americans are unique in their learning styles. McPhail and McPhail examined learning and instructional theories in community colleges to determine if they were instrumental in improving the academic performance of African American learners. The researchers found that African Americans have distinct learning styles when compared to their peers of European descent. The researchers then concluded that African American learners use strategies that are “universalistic, intuitive, and most important, person-oriented” (p. 26).

McKusick and I.P. McPhail (2003) indicated that “the curriculum should be transformed to reflect the histories and perspectives of all people and should be adapted to make learning relevant to the lives of all learners through contextualization and application to everyday life” (p.18). Moreover, McPhail & McPhail (1999) further suggested that in order for learning facilitators to be successful in teaching the African American learner, they should create an

empowerment culture for learners in the classroom and beyond by: (1) learning more about the culture of African American students, (2) listening to the voices of their learners, (3) weaving the realities of their learners' lives into the curriculum, (4) including positive representations of the African American cultural heritage in the curriculum, and (5) revising, extending, and reformulating the theory of cultural mediation in instruction over time and with additional research.

In their review of the programs that promote student success for African American males in the community college, Mosby et al. (2006) concluded that:

There is consensus among researchers that promoting the academic success of African American males is a successful method of predicting retention. The two most successful methods identified included establishing mentoring programs and through the training and development of a pedagogically effective faculty (p. 8).

Similarly, Costner (2004) emphasized the connection between cultures, teaching, and learning. Costner examined faculty attitudes towards teaching African American students in the community college. Costner found that in order to include all learners, community colleges must do more to assist faculty in recognizing the importance and the connection between cultures, teaching and learning.

Finally, McPhail and Costner (2004) identified seven principles for training a culturally responsive faculty. These principles included the following: (1) structure professional development activities that focus on cultural responsiveness; (2) ensure that all faculty respect the culture of their students;

(3) value and celebrate culture-promote cultural sensitivity; (4) embrace an empowerment culture; (5) communicate the college's commitment to cultural responsiveness; (6) take away barriers that impede progress; and (7) help faculty to use effective pedagogical methods for teaching African Americans.

Critical Theory

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2005) a critical theory has to meet three criteria if it is to be considered adequate: "it must be explanatory, practical, and normative. The explanatory goal could be furthered only through interdisciplinary research that includes psychological cultural and social dimensions, as well as institutional forms of domination" (p.1). The Encyclopedia also had the following to say about ideology in the context of critical theory:

ideology restricts or limits such processes of communication and undermines the conditions of *success* [emphasis added] within them . . . the theory of ideology, therefore, analyzes the ways in which linguistic-symbolic meanings are used to encode, produce and reproduce relations of power and domination . . . theory of distorted communication is therefore especially suited to the ways in which meanings are used to reproduce power even under explicit rules of equality and freedom (p.5).

Critical theory is defined as a theory that seeks "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (Horkheimer 1982, p. 244). Critical theory is most frequently associated with the Frankfurt School or with individual philosophers including Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermass, Benjamin and Marcuse

and is concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender (Fay, 1987). Critical theory offered an interdisciplinary perspective which sought to inform the struggle against oppression in all its forms (Bronner, 2002).

Critical and emancipatory research can best be understood in the context defined by Denzin & Lincoln (2005) who linked critical research to critical theory and stated that “from critical theory, [critical] researchers inherit a forceful criticism” (p.305). Critical theory and research are never satisfied with merely increasing knowledge they are also concerned with the empowerment of individuals. By applying a critical perspective the research “becomes a transformative endeavor” (p. 305).

Similarly, Hooks (1994) viewed applying a critical perspective to education as a transformative praxis of freedom and believed that “teaching is a performative act . . . that offers the space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each classroom” (p. 11). Hooks further argued about the damage caused by the mis-education of Black men and the importance of a critical education for Black men:

So we see again there is no alternative vision of how Black men who are unemployed could be leading their lives. And Black men who have made it just see themselves as having won the competition. If you believe in competition, then you believe that those people who didn't make it weren't good enough. The whole issue is still framed within the existing hierarchy, and within the existing hierarchy, Black men are doomed. Who cares

about Black men, the most ignored group in America? Black men need both regular literacy—they are the most illiterate group in the nation—and critical literacy. They need to critique the notion of patriarchal masculinity to save their own lives. (p.11)

In the first phase of the literature review, the researcher used Critical Theory to question the prevailing assumptions about reality, or better stated, question some of the things taken for granted as “facts” about reality. Viewed through a frame that is informed by critical theory, the researcher considers the extant literature on African American males in the American educational system and “analyzes the ways in which linguistic-symbolic meanings are used to encode, produce and reproduce relations of power and domination...(Stanford, 2005, p.5). By neglecting to examine the conditions from a critical perspective, prior research failed to provide insight and information sufficient to fully explain and/or remedy the educational experiences of African American males. As such, the prior research simply produced meanings which “are used to reproduce power even under explicit rules of equality and freedom” (p.5).

Critical Race Theory

In this the second phase of the literature review, the researcher culled from Critical Race Theory the component of *counterstories* and added it to the theoretical framework. Therefore, in addition to questioning the prevailing assumptions about reality, the frame now also concerns itself with the concept of African American males being able to participate in the authorship of the stories within which they are the subjects. This perspective contrasts from past

practices where the perspectives of African American males in higher education were overlooked or taken for granted when it came to research about their academic challenges, successes and development processes (Majors & Billson, 1992; Ross, 1998). Critical race theory is important because this theoretical framework recognizes, appreciates and values the importance of perspectives of people outside of the dominant culture” (Osiris, 2005, p. 91). CRT is grounded by the civil rights struggles for justice and equality of opportunity and it further supports a platform on which the African American male perspective can be recognized (Berry, 2001). When applied to education, CRT can confront the social construct of race, racism in its many forms, and the damaging stereotypes that negatively impact on the educational experiences of African American males (Delgado, 1995; Solorzano & Villalpando, 1998; Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 1999).

Delgado (1995) argued that the stories of people of color are born from a different frame of reference, and therefore impart to them a voice that is different from the dominant culture of hegemonic whiteness and deserves to be heard. In Macey’s (2000) definition of hegemony contained the following description of how hegemonic whiteness is maintained:

The term derives from the Greek *hegemon*, meaning leader, prominent power or dominant state or person and is widely used to denote political dominance. A more specific and sophisticated concept of hegemony is elaborated by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* (1971).

Gramsci's notion of hegemony makes an important contribution to the theory of ideology . . . the state establishes and reproduces the dominance. The establishment of a hegemony is the task of the organic intellectuals of the ruling class. At the highest level, they create philosophy, the sciences and the arts; at a lower level, they administer an existing body of knowledge and ideology through their work in the educational system, cultural institutions and the media. (p. 177)

Critical race theory has been applied to education in order to challenge the social construct of race, the multiple forms of racism and the damaging racial stereotypes that impact education and the educational experiences of African American males and other ethnic minority groups (Delgado, 1995; Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999; Solorzano, Villalpando, 1998). CRT methodology in education brings focus to the experiences of ethnic minority students in the U.S. educational system. CRT places these students' experience at the center of analysis, examining stories and counterstories of marginalized student groups (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000).

By constructing counterstories, in which the detailed experiences of marginalized students are told, the dominant cultural viewpoint of the American educational system can be challenged. These counterstories play an essential function by providing a more holistic perspective on American education. Ladson-Billings (2000) asserts that these counterstories from the perspective of marginalized student group members are "epistemologically valuable" in understanding American education practices in order to transform them (Ladson-

Billings, 2000). In essence, CRT helps create a space for the stories of marginalized students to be heard and effectively used to inform education research and American education institutions (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Within CRT the experiences of minority students within the American educational system are brought into focus as the center of analysis. The perspectives of these marginalized student groups are called *counterstories* (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). The detailed experiences of marginalized students provide effective counterstories to the dominant cultural viewpoint of the American educational system. These counterstories can play a critical role in providing a more holistic perspective on American education. Ladson-Billings (2000) asserts that these counterstories from the perspective of marginalized student group members are “epistemologically valuable” in understanding American education practices in order to transform them (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Simply put, CRT creates a space where the stories of marginalized students can be heard and effectively used to inform education research and American educational institutions (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000).

For the purposes of the current study, the researcher culled the component of *counterstories* from CRT and applied it to the theoretical framework. This perspective contrasts from past practices where the perspectives of African American males in higher education were overlooked or taken for granted when it came to research about their academic challenges, successes and development processes (Majors & Billson, 1992; Ross, 1998).

Although CRT has had a limited application to study the African American male academic experience, a few researchers have made forays into this territory. Berry (2001) utilized CRT to in a study of the success in middle school of African American males. The students were part of a University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill pre-college program. This study explored factors posed by CRT that African American male middle school students encountered. The research also explored the factors that these students utilized to overcome the limitations that CRT addresses. Berry found that parental involvement and high teacher expectations were critical contributing factors to the academic success of the African American students he interviewed.

Osiris (2005) on the other hand applied CRT to the experience of African American males at traditionally white institutions (TWI) and concluded that African American male academic success is more closely related to their overall collegiate experience and sense of belonging as opposed to their academic ability. African American males are more prone to experience academic failure when their experiences at TWIs are devalued or disconnected to campus life.

CRT identifies critical components of African American male lack of academic success to be attributable to racism, educational inequality, and institutional practices that adversely impact African Americans. Berry (2001) stated that African American males face a plethora of challenges on the road to academic achievement. CRT explains many of the obstacles African Americans males face in their effort to be academically successful in the community college. Therefore, in addition to questioning the prevailing assumptions about reality, the

frame now also concerns itself with the concept of African American males being able to participate in the authorship of the stories within which they are the subjects.

Critical Pedagogy

For the third phase of the literature review, critical pedagogy adds the component of *agency* to the theoretical frame. It was Aronowitz (1998) who reminded teachers that the educator's task is not to mold people in the manner of Pygmalion, that the critical educator is charged with encouraging human agency—development of the capacities of people to take control of their own destinies. Snyder (1991) offered a slightly different description of agency as the belief in one's capacity to initiate and sustain actions to reach the goal.

Critical pedagogy speaks to the role of schools in the reproduction of inequality by using both hidden and 'official' curricula to support dominant class hegemony and teach students to devalue the voices that are represented by the students (Apple, 1990). Like critical race theory, critical pedagogy recommends the use of counternarratives to engage poor and disempowered students to participate in a critical analysis of their world (Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). Critical pedagogy is perhaps best defined by Shor (1992) as:

habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal

consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse. (p. 129)

Critical pedagogy argues that school practices need to be informed by a public philosophy that addresses how to construct ideological and institutional conditions in which the lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority of students becomes the defining feature of schooling (Giroux, 1994). Critical pedagogy “signals how questions of audience, voice, power, and evaluation actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions and society, and classrooms and communities” (Giroux, 1994 p. 30).

The work of critical theory “has been taken into education in a number of different ways, but most notably by Paulo Freire in his work with oppressed peasant farmers in Brazil which gave rise to the term critical pedagogy, meaning teaching-learning from within the principles of critical theory” (Tripp, 1992, p. 1). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) argued that oppressed people have no “voice” and they create a “culture of silence” (p. 89). Freire further argued that education has been used to oppress people by not only teaching them their place in society, but by also teaching them to exist “inside a structure which made them *beings for others*” (p. 61).

On the other hand, Freire went on to say that the same educational system that is used to oppress people can also be used to liberate them. “The solution is not to integrate them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become *beings for themselves*” (p. 61). In order to do this a sense of agency must be restored. Similarly, Snyder (1991) developed

a theory of hope which included a concept of agency that is relevant here. Snyder's theory consists of two interrelated cognitive components, referred to as agency and pathways. Agency is described as the belief in one's capacity to initiate and sustain actions to reach the goal. Pathways, on the other hand were described as the belief in one's capacity to generate routes to reach goals.

Summary

This literature review addressed the four main categories: overview of theoretical explanations of the educational experiences of African American males, the general experience of African American males in higher education, and the experience of African American males in community college. It also investigated the underlying definition, philosophy, and theoretical framework of Appreciative Inquiry. The literature established a firm foundation to understanding the plight of African American males in the American educational system, but they failed to consider the voices of the African American male community college student in describing the factors that contribute to their academic success. Towards that end the review of the literature provided a springboard to launch onward into an Appreciative Inquiry to formulate a response to the research question: How do African American male community college students describe the factors that contribute to their success?

Chapter Three is an in-depth description of how the framework of Appreciative Inquiry promotes a broad and holistic approach to exploring how African American males perceive, define and achieve academic success in community college. Also, using a number of paired interviews and focus groups

in different college settings generated a greater quantity of readily manageable data from a diverse community represented by the five colleges, than would be achieved by simply conducting individual interviews.

CHAPTER III

REARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to identify the key factors that African American males perceive as significantly contributing to their academic success in community college. In other words, the students' voices are lifted so that they can share their perspectives and critical insights through their stories of success. This study is a doctoral dissertation in the qualitative tradition which employed an Appreciative Inquiry methodology.

This chapter is divided into four sections that outline the methodology used to examine the experiences of academically successful African American males in community college. The first section outlines the research questions and the research design. The second section outlines the rationale for this study. The third section presents an overview of Appreciative Inquiry and how it was used to facilitate the focus group discussions. The fourth section outlines the methodological assumptions.

Study Participants

This section will address who the participants in this research study were, and how they were selected. In a complex community like African American males, there is a diversity of opinions, attitudes, values, and practices; therefore it was necessary to ensure that members from all relevant sub-groups were included. The study would garner broader interest and greater credibility if it involved a broad cross-section of members from the college communities, or

“maximum variation sampling” was applied in the selection of institutions to participate in the study (Glesne, 1999, p. 29). This would not only enhance quality and quantity of participation, but it could ultimately facilitate successful implementation of any recommendations arising out of the research. “Active participation is the key to feelings of ownership that motivate people to invest their time and energy to help shape the nature and quality of their community lives” (Stringer, 1999, p. 38).

Some assistance was provided by key administrators who volunteered to assist with the recruitment and selection of participants at each of the five college campuses. Additionally, participant volunteers agreed to act as a peer advisor for piloting the questions for the paired interview and focus group process, and any further debriefing as needed. Beyond these activities, the research leader undertook the research tasks in this study. The researcher served as not only the research leader, but also as the facilitator of the Appreciative Inquiry paired interviews and focus group interviews, choosing not to ask a faculty facilitator in the participating colleges to guide the groups. There seemed little or no benefit in removing the researcher from the direct group interaction, to facilitate observation and note taking.

Settings

Site selection in this study was determined on the basis that the sites represent ordinal or typical, comprehensive, unique, critical, comparable, or accessible cases (M. Q. Patton, 2002). Five community colleges in the Mid-Atlantic region were selected to participate in the study. Two colleges

represented urban settings, two represented suburban settings and one college was in a rural setting.

Count Basie Community College is a Medium-sized public, urban-serving single-college, multi-campus system which is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Count Basie offers Associate's level degrees in 35 areas and 25 certificate programs that lead to immediate entry into the workforce.

Count Basie's annual credit and non-credit enrollment combined exceeds 19,000 students, with a higher rate of part-time than full time attendance, resulting in a full-time equivalent of 7,318. According to Count Basie student data, 90% of its students are from groups designated as a minority group and 10 % are White. The average age of credit students is 26 years.

Gil Scott Heron Community College is a Medium-sized public, suburban-serving single campus college which is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Gil Scott Heron is an associate's degree granting institution which boasts a full time equivalent of 5,636, with a relatively balanced distribution of its students between the part-time and full-time categories which earned Gil Scott Heron the Mixed Part-time/Full-time categorization.

Herbie Hancock Community College is a Medium-sized public, suburban-serving single-campus college which is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. With a higher part-time than full-time percentage of students attending, Herbie Hancock registers a full-time equivalent

of 6,711. According to Herbie Hancock student data, 57.0% of its credit students are female and 43% are male, 53% are White, with 22% African American, and an overall minority population of 47%. The average age of credit students is 22 years.

Miles Davis Community College is a single multi-campus system with a full-time equivalent of 22,256 it is categorized as a Very Large, public, suburban-serving college. The Institution is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and offers programs leading to the associate's degree as well as workforce development certificate programs.

The student population of Miles Davis Community College has a higher percentage of part-time than full-time students with the average age of credit students at 22. According to Miles Davis student data, 56.0% of its credit students are female, 58.8 % of its students are from minority groups with 27.5% of the total student population being African American.

Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College is a public, single-campus institution which is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. The institution offers programs leading to certificates, associate's degrees, or transfer to four-year institutions. With a full-time equivalent of 20,606, the institution is categorized as Very Large and has a higher part-time than full-time attendance. According to Parker Community College student data, 74% of its credit students represent various minority groups, while 51% are African American. The average age of credit students is 25.

Immediately upon receipt of Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval to conduct a study which included human subjects, (Appendix A) sampling began. The sampling strategy employed was non-probability sampling which is also known as purposeful sampling and is “the sampling method of choice for qualitative procedures” (Creswell, 2003). A sample of thirty-one participants volunteered for the study. For the purposes of this study currently engaged was defined as: (a) Having completed at least two consecutive semesters, and (b) earned a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or better. The students selected to participate in the study were all actively involved in a class, a club, or a team at their home institution. Volunteers self-selected from an open invitation extended by the key administrator throughout the respective college community, using the invitation letter (Appendix B). Both participants and colleges were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality for the individual participant and to maintain the anonymity of the college. The colleges were all located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States and, based on their classification in the Carnegie Foundation Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2005), ranged in size from medium to very large, and reflected both urban and suburban settings. Each college represented a unique setting.

Focus Group Interviews

Data were collected from 60-minute focus groups interviews of African American men in five community colleges in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The perspectives of African American men on factors that contribute to academic success are the most important component in this stage of the study

(Osiris, 2005). Denzin & Lincoln (2005) supported the use of focus groups because they “have been used to elicit and validate collective testimonies, to give voice to the previously silenced by creating a safe space for sharing one’s life experiences” (p. 648). Additionally, “critical focus groups...create the conditions for the emergence of a critical race consciousness, a consciousness focused on social change. It seems that with critical focus groups, critical race theory and progressive politics have found their methodology” (p. 649). For this study, participants were interviewed in focus groups utilizing an Appreciative Inquiry protocol which consists of matching group interviews with a paired interview component as recommended by Preskill & Catsambas (2006).

The researcher used an Appreciative Inquiry format to guide the focus group interviews. The literature review helped to generate the interview questions as developed by Osiris (2005) and the “Appreciative Inquiry approach was used to allow the researcher to create wording and sequencing of questions in the course of the interview” (Clark, 2006, p.46). The overarching research question in this study is: How do African American males define success? Three supporting research questions guided the study:

1. How do African American males describe their experiences in the community college?
2. How do African American males describe thee components that contribute to their success?
3. How do African American males articulate the ideal conditions that promote their success?

At the beginning of the dyad dialogue meetings, participants were briefed with an overview of the Appreciative Inquiry approach and procedure with a PowerPoint presentation. The researcher also reviewed the necessary protocols to create a respectful, non-judgmental, non-threatening, and open environment. These comments reinforced the protocols reviewed in the consent form which was provided to each participant and which had to be duly signed and submitted prior to participation in the research meeting. To provide consistency in the conduct of the dialogue paired interviews and focus group meetings and some support and guidance for the researcher with respect to the meetings' content, the researcher described the 4-D Process for the participants and distributed a Focus Group Protocol to be used with the paired interview dyads which was modified from Osiris (2005) and is included as Appendix C. Ultimately, these relatively small groups did secure the desired safe, intimate, and comfortable environment, and they did generate an adequate and manageable amount of data.

The dyads worked through the four stages of Appreciative Inquiry described earlier as Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny or Deliver. This model, discussed in Watkins and Mohr (2001), is referred to as the GEM Four-D model. It was developed in 1990 at the Global Excellence in Management (GEM) Initiative's Organizational Excellence Program in Zimbabwe, as part of a joint initiative with Save the Children for building partnerships.

Data Collection

Participants were interviewed in focus groups using a standard interview protocol with the following ten open-ended questions: Describe your experience as an African American male community college student; Describe a time when you feel you performed really well as a community college student; Identify what factors contributed to your success; Who has played a significant role supporting your academic success; Describe a time when you were proud to be a member of the group of African American men in college. Why were you proud; What do you value most about being a member of this group, and why; How has racism played a role in your academic achievement and how have you circumvented it; How have you eliminated any obstacles to your academic achievement; What needs to be done in community college to help African American males be more successful academically; Participants were instructed to produce an affirmative statement (a Provocative Proposition) that describes the idealized future as if it were already happening.

Each paired interview dyad discussed their data with the intent of validating the accuracy of their notes, and identifying the major common themes emerging from the data. Spokespersons for each paired interview dyad were then asked to share in the whole group the basic themes identified in their dyad. All focus group interviews were conducted in person and were tape recorded with the permission of the participants. The researcher transcribed all data personally to verify accuracy. Field notes were also incorporated into the transcripts to capture nuances that may not have been reflected on the audio tape. Focus

group interviews which were scheduled for ninety minutes frequently lasted for more than two hours. Initially all interviews were to also be video taped, however, after the first group in which the video became somewhat of a distraction, and during subsequent sessions where participants indicated a preference to not be video taped, the researcher elected to forgo video taping and only use audio taping along with field notes.

Dream: During the second phase of the dialogue meeting, this Discovery data were reintroduced and the participants in dyads worked to develop principles or provocative propositions (Watkins and Mohr (2001, p.135). In this stage, participants were asked: "What might be?" (Hammond, 1998, p.24). These propositions should represent a stretch for the participants, and be relevant to the research goal of *lifting the voices* of African American male community college students to articulate their successes. These principles provide some framework for moving these changes forward in the future.

In this Dream stage, the participants in their dyads selected their provocative proposition from the data by answering the following question: "What statement could capture a principle in relation to African American males and success in community college that emerges from the positive experiences shared around these themes?" The dyads then posted their principles or provocative propositions on flip chart paper or loose-leaf paper in order for the larger group to validate the propositions. The data generated by these research meetings, both in dyads and as a whole, will be destroyed immediately after the research study final report has been accepted as complete, for graduation from the CCLDP

program (May 2008). This application of the Appreciative Inquiry method is consistent with Stringer's (1999) conception of research as participatory, inclusive, and culturally appropriate.

Appreciative Inquiry

While the success of African American male students in the community college is the essence of the research question, Appreciative Inquiry is the essence of both the methodology and the philosophy underlying this qualitative study. With this approach, African American males create energy that infuses them with a "sense of commitment, confidence and affirmation that they already have been successful. They also know clearly how to make more moments of success" (Hammond, 1998, p. 7).

What is Appreciative Inquiry? Bushe (1998) defines Appreciative Inquiry as a "process that studies something from the positive side to create a new kind of conversation among people" (p.2). Cooperrider and Whitney (1999, p. 10) enhanced Bushe's definition by declaring that:

Appreciative Inquiry is the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives "life". In AI, intervention gives way to imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism, and spiraling diagnosis there is discovery, dream, and design. AI assumes that every living system has untapped, rich, and inspiring accounts of the positive. Link this "positive change core" directly to any change agenda, and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized. (p. 10)

Hammond (1998) articulated a view of AI simply as a way to look for what works. The tangible result then, is a series of statements that describe the high moments of where the participants have been. Because the statements are grounded in real experience and history, “people know how to repeat their success” (p. 7).

Watkins and Mohr (2001, p. 36) describe the “DNA” or essential components of Appreciative Inquiry. They describe the theoretical framework of Appreciative Inquiry in terms of core principles that incorporate the beliefs and values inherent in this research method. Subsequently, they describe core processes to implement Appreciative Inquiry. Watkins and Mohr (2001) first identify three theoretical and research foundations of Appreciative Inquiry from which the principles and processes of Appreciative Inquiry emerge. They cite social constructionism as one foundation, declaring that, “as the people of an organization create meaning through their dialogue together they sow the seeds of the organization’s future” (p. 26). They also cite “the ‘new’ sciences (quantum physics, chaos theory, complexity theory, and self-organizing systems) and research on the power of image as theoretical and research foundations of Appreciative Inquiry.

The underlying principles and assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry have been articulated by several practitioners (Bushe, 1998; Cooperrider, 1986; Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999; Hammond, 1998; Reed, 2007; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). However, the assumptions underlying Appreciative Inquiry as it relates to research have been most clearly articulated by Reed (2007) as follows: (a) In

every society, organization, or group, something works; (b) what we focus on becomes our reality; (c) reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities; (d) the act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way; (e) people have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known); (f) if we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past; (g) it is important to value differences; (h) the language we use creates our reality (p. 28). As this study is an Appreciative Inquiry, then the eight assumptions of AI as they relate to the success of African American male community college students are the assumptions of this study.

Finally, Appreciative Inquiry will be of interest to the qualitative researcher because AI practitioners believe that organizations are a social reality and social reality is co-constructed through peoples' interactions with each other and thereby challenges the assumptions made by conventional methods of inquiry (Bushe, 1998). When applied to the current study AI acknowledges that the social reality of the achievement gap experienced by African American males in community colleges is "co-constructed" and African American males do not only have to operate as subjects of research, but they can also be instrumental in defining the causes of, and possible solutions to the problems which confront them in the community college.

Appreciative Inquiry is the appropriate framework for use in responding to the request made by Aldridge (2001) for African-descended scholars in the 21st century to revitalize the scholarly tradition forged by W. E. B. Dubois and take the

lead in critical and emancipatory research that asserts *Black voice and Black agency*. When focusing on what contributes to the success of African American males in the community college, Jones (2005) has concluded that “this specific experience can only come from the voices of Black men” (p.26).

The DNA of Appreciative Inquiry includes the processes for actually implementing the methodology. Watkins and Mohr (2001) describe the “Four- D Model” of Appreciative Inquiry, which comprises a four-part cycle. The first stage is Discovery, where stakeholders engage in story-telling and sharing experiences of what has really worked well - appreciating and valuing the best of what is. The second stage is Dream - envisioning what might be. Participants craft a possibility statement or provocative proposition - a sort of vision statement to bridge the discovery of past examples of excellence, to the future dream of even greater excellence. The third stage is Design - dialoguing about what needs to be done to create an ideal organization to make the dream happen and attain greater excellence. The fourth and final stage is Destiny - inviting action, developing the strategy and action plan co-constructing the future. The fourth stage “in Cooperrider’s original work was called *Delivery*. It was changed to *Destiny* because he felt it did not go far enough in communicating the liberating impact of AI work (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006, p. 33).

Why choose the appreciative frame as a methodology? Simply put, it is congruent with who the researcher is, with the research questions, and with the context of the study. However, a more in-depth exploration considers some research methodology design questions in the context of critical theory (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2005). The basic belief behind inquiry that is grounded in critical theory is that of a “transformative intellectual who operates as an advocate and activist” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 194). Additionally, Reed (2007) linked Appreciative Inquiry to critical theory by stating that “the role of inquiry is to challenge and to critically evaluate these processes in a way that can emancipate participants from the restrictions that these ideas can entail” (p.57). Inquiry into beliefs should appropriate a research methodology that can be described as interactive, with such tools as focus groups and interviews (Cook & Allison, 1998). Critical theory supported the researcher’s choice of a research methodology based on a qualitative approach within an appreciative frame. There was congruency between the researcher, my research questions, the context of the study, and the research methodology.

Researcher as Research Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the main research instrument (2002). As such, the experiences that qualify this researcher to conduct this study include being a Licensed, Certified Social Worker with a Clinical specialization and twenty years experience working with African American males; trained in the application of Appreciative Inquiry; and lifetime membership in the group of men of African descent. In terms of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, 1998) the researcher has an Extroverted-Intuitive-Feeling-Judging (ENFJ) preference. An ENFJ preference means that the researcher focuses energy on the world outside and although the researcher is empathic and compassionate, the researcher looks for the meaning in all things

and asks why things are the way they are. The personal history of this researcher includes over 20 years as a social worker with a particular emphasis on an African American male client population. In this capacity the researcher has served in the role of therapist, counselor, mentor, teacher, and advocate. Additionally, the researcher's coursework at the masters and doctoral levels have also provided an ample foundation in research methods. Prior training and experience as a psychotherapist have sharpened the researcher's skills at active listening, observation, recording, and interpreting information which are very applicable to the research interview. As an educator, the researcher has spent the past twelve years instructing African American male students at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

Methodological Assumptions

This researcher is aware that "various perspectives for inquiry are appropriate in different critical situations" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005, p.15). However, Jones (2005) asserted that "a qualitative framework is most appropriate for this study as it captures and illustrates how Black men have made meaning of their collegiate experiences...this specific experience could only come from the voices of Black men" (p. 26). The qualitative approach differs from traditional quantitative or positivist research methods. While the latter employs a tightly controlled scientific approach, the former is primarily "a practical tool for solving problems experienced by people in their professional, community, or private lives" (Stringer, 1999, p. 11).

Creswell (2007) identified eight possible validation strategies frequently used by qualitative researchers. These include: triangulation—corroborating evidence from different sources; peer review—where a peer debriefs the researcher regarding methods, meanings, and interpretations to keep the researcher honest; negative case analysis—the researcher revises the initial hypothesis until all the cases fit; clarifying researcher bias—the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that are likely to have shaped the interpretation and approach to the study; member checking—the researcher solicits participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations; rich, thick description—describes in detail the participants or setting under study; external audits—examines both the process and the product to assess for accuracy; prolonged engagement—where the researcher works with the participants day in and day out.

Of the eight strategies listed above, Creswell recommended that qualitative researchers engage in at least two strategies to establish the validity in any given study. In this study the researcher will establish methodological rigor by engaging in the four following validation strategies: peer review, member checking, triangulating the data, and clarification of researcher bias.

The foregoing description of the Appreciative Inquiry process confirms that most of these qualities are quite explicit, especially with very active participation of the participants in validating data and generating emergent themes. Additionally, two peers acted as peer advisors for further debriefing.

Some degree of transferability to other community college contexts should be readily apparent. Without losing sight of the uniqueness of each community college in the post-secondary educational system, the transferability from participant colleges of the research methodology and method is evident, due to similarity in many of the respective contexts. Dependability and reliability will be realized through clear descriptions of the data collection and analysis processes and the availability of raw data. Finally, in relation to trustworthiness and rigor, Glesne (1999) issued a caveat about the researcher's subjectivity:

It is when you feel angry, irritable, gleeful, excited, or sad that you can be sure that your subjectivity is at work. The goal is to explore such feelings to learn what they are telling you about who you are in relationship to what you are learning and to what may be keeping yourself from learning (p. 105).

The researcher made every attempt to be vigilant with regard to subjectivity, especially with 20 years of "baggage" with the participant population. This issue of researcher bias will be addressed further in the section below.

According to Creswell (2007), "clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study is important so that the reader understands the researcher's position" (p. 206). Peshkin (1988) argued that the researcher must be aware of the subjective self and the role that this subjective self plays in research. Eisner (1998) went one step further and suggested that the researcher's personal history will impact what the researcher sees and how the researcher interprets what is seen. This researcher is able to maintain an objective professional stance

while continuing to feel compassion for the participants in the study. “I am committed to seeing with an open mind rather than being confined to only seeing what I think should be there. My intent is to gain insight into the experiences of others rather than to allow my biases to “interfere with what I see” (Kilbourn, 2006, p. 547).

Methodological Rigor is an important element of research. It is important to ensure that the inquiry methods have “minimized the possibility that the investigation was superficial, biased, or insubstantial” (Stringer, 1999, p. 176). The basis of trustworthiness in research according to Stringer is to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability and reliability. Credibility comes from prolonged engagement with participants, triangulation of information from multiple sources, validation of data with participants and peer debriefing.

Data Coding

Once all focus group interviews were conducted, the audio tapes and field notes were transcribed and stored in an electronic data file. The qualitative data software package Atlas.ti allowed the researcher to segment the data and to group it with other data. This process of sifting through large data sets in an attempt to describe, classify, and interpret data in order to establish categories of information or codes is referred to as winnowing (Creswell, 2005). The author further recommends maintaining a list of not more than 25-30 codes so that the process remains manageable.

Data Analysis

The theoretical basis of organization and analysis of the data is the focus of this section. According to Berg (2004), “data analysis can be defined as consisting of three concurrent flows of action: data reduction, data display, and conclusions and verification” (p. 39). Data reduction “directs attention to the need for focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data into a more manageable form” (p.39). Data must be displayed in an organized and compressed manner that facilitates analysis and the drawing of conclusions (p.39). Berg states that once data reduction and display have occurred, “analytic conclusions may begin to emerge and define themselves more clearly and definitively” (p.39). Finally, conclusions must be confirmed or verified, with the procedures clearly documented to ensure the study can be replicated by other researchers. In qualitative research, responses to open-ended questions provide the evaluator with quotations which are the main source of raw data. It is the task of the qualitative researcher to provide a framework within which participants can respond in a way that accurately and thoroughly represents their point of view (M. Q. Patton, 2002).

Data analysis in this study began immediately after working through the Discovery stage questions in the paired interviews and consisted of repeated review of over seven hours of audio tape and 120 pages of verbatim transcriptions and field notes. Analysis of the data collected from participants during this study provided insight into what some successful African American males in community college perceive as being important to their academic

success. During the analysis of the data twenty-five categories of information or codes emerged. The codes that emerged included: Achievement (Awards, Grades/GPA, completion); Advisor connection; Faculty mentor; Alumni/Peer mentor; Handle my business; Persistence/Perseverance; Accomplishing goals; Racism; Post racism; Prove “them” wrong; I am somebody; Drug use; Turn a negative into a positive; Role model-for young men/for my kids; Fashion show; Girls as a deterrent; Good grades; Personal contact with an Advisor; Early peer support; Outreach; Commitment to studying; Use this opportunity; They have to want it; Connection to group of men beyond just me; Proud to be in that number.

From these twenty-five categories of information, or codes, ten themes emerged that were identified as significant to the success of African American males in community college. These themes included: Achievement; I am Somebody; My Brother’s Keeper; Prove Them Wrong; Handle My Business; Mentor/Advisor; Post-Race Consciousness; Culture of Success; Program Resource; Hope.

In the final step of the data analysis process, this researcher identified the five following composites through interpretation of the data collected and analyzed by site in this study: I am Somebody; My Brother’s Keeper; Post-Race Consciousness; Culture of Success; Program Resource. A more detailed discussion of the codes, themes, and composites will be provided in Chapter Four under findings.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the factors that African American male community college students perceive as important to their academic success. This chapter opens with a brief description of the participants and characteristics of the colleges represented by the participants in this study. The remainder of the chapter presents excerpts of the participant responses presented sequentially by the individual research questions.

The researcher asked the participants in the focus group a series of questions: Describe your experience as an African American male community college student; Describe a time when you feel you performed really well as a community college student; Identify what factors contributed to your success; Who has played a significant role supporting your academic success; Describe a time when you were proud to be a member of the group of African American men in college. Why were you proud; What do you value most about being a member of this group, Why; How has racism played a role in your academic achievement and how have you circumvented it; How have you eliminated any obstacles to your academic achievement; What needs to be done in community college to help African American males be more successful academically; Write an affirmative statement (Provocative Proposition) that describes the idealized future as if it were already happening.

The findings will be presented sequentially by research questions. In order to structure the presentation of findings, summary responses from focus groups at each of the five campuses will be presented one question at a time. At the end of each question, a composite of the responses from the participants will be presented.

Participants and Settings

The researcher conducted focus groups at five different community colleges. The participants in the focus group were currently enrolled African American male community college students. The focus groups ranged in size from 4 to 7. The participants ranged in age from eighteen to fifty-eight. Participants maintained a grade point average of 2.0 or better while being continuously enrolled for at least three consecutive semesters at their respective community college. Both participants and colleges were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality for the individual participant and to maintain the anonymity of the college. All of the colleges were located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States and, based on their classification in the Carnegie Foundation Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2005), ranged in size from medium to very large, and reflected both urban and suburban settings. Each college represented a unique setting:

Count Basie Community College is a Medium-sized public, urban-serving single-college, multi-campus system which is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Count Basie offers Associate's level degrees

in 35 areas and 25 certificate programs that lead to immediate entry into the workforce.

Count Basie's annual credit and non-credit enrollment combined exceeds 19,000 students, with a higher rate of part-time than full time attendance, resulting in a full-time equivalent of 7,318. According to Count Basie student data, 90% of its students are from groups designated as a minority group and 10% are White. The average age of credit students is 26 years.

Gil Scott Heron Community College is a Medium-sized public, suburban-serving single campus college which is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Gil Scott Heron is an associate's degree granting institution which boasts a full time equivalent of 5,636, with a relatively balanced distribution of its students between the part-time and full-time categories which earned Gil Scott Heron the Mixed Part-time/Full-time categorization.

Herbie Hancock Community College is a Medium-sized public, suburban-serving single-campus college which is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. With a higher part-time than full-time percentage of students attending, Herbie Hancock registers a full-time equivalent of 6,711. According to Herbie Hancock student data, 57.0% of its credit students are female and 43 % are male, 53% are White, with 22% African American, and an overall minority population of 47%. The average age of credit students is 22 years.

Miles Davis Community College is a single multi-campus system with a full-time equivalent of 22,256 it is categorized as a Very Large, public, suburban-serving college. The Institution is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and offers programs leading to the associate's degree as well as workforce development certificate programs.

The student population of Miles Davis Community College has a higher percentage of part-time than full-time students with the average age of credit students at 22. According to Miles Davis student data, 56.0% of its credit students are female, 58.8 % of its students are from minority groups with 27.5% of the total student population being African American.

Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College is a public, single- campus institution which is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. The institution offers programs leading to certificates, associate's degrees, or transfer to four-year institutions. With a full-time equivalent of 20,606, the institution is categorized as Very Large and has a higher part-time than full-time attendance. According to Parker Community College student data, 74% of its credit students represent various minority groups, while 51% are African American. The average age of credit students is 25.

Participant Responses by Research Question

This section contains excerpts of the participant responses gleaned from the verbatim transcriptions of the focus group interviews held on the five community college campuses. The major ideas discussed during the focus groups in response to the interview questions are presented in this section. The

data is sequentially presented with descriptors after each excerpt to capture the researcher's interpretation of the participants' experiences and perceptions of success.

In the analysis of the data, the researcher utilized in vivo coding. In vivo coding is consistent with the goal of the study which was to give voice to and explore the perspectives of African American men in the American community college regarding the factors that contribute to their academic success. Rather than culling pre-established themes from the research literature, emphasis was placed on creating a space where participants could construct counternarratives and describe their experiences in their own words and then identify themes which emerged from their descriptions of their experiences. The burden of meaning-making is that of the researcher. St. Pierre (2005) asserted that this is not a neutral activity that simply matches word to world. "Interpretation does not clarify a matter to be interpreted, which offers itself passively; it can only seize, and violently, an already-present interpretation, which it must overthrow, upset, shatter with the blows of a hammer" (pp. 968-969). In the interpretation of the data, particular attention was paid to themes that could potentially influence the academic lives of African American men through educational or programmatic intervention.

African American Males Describe their Experiences in the Community College

In Discovery, the first stage of the 4-D Process, critical theory was applied to address the first research question: How do African American males describe their experiences in the community college? In general critical theory is used to

question the prevailing assumptions about reality. For the purposes of the current study reality is defined as the African American male experience in the community college. With respect to the current study, critical theory is applied by asking African American males to question the prevailing assumptions about their experience in the community college. Participants were asked the following question: Describe your experience as an African American male community college student. Listed below are excerpts and descriptors from participant responses according to the corresponding focus group question. The excerpts represent the participants' experiences in their own words.

Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College

When asked to describe their experience as an African American male community college student, participants in the Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College focus group indicated that their overall experiences were positive. The responses ranged from the experience being a challenging experience to being one of joy. Selected examples of participant comments include:

TALIB (19), had this to say about his experience:

This is a majority African American body of students that's here so everyone pretty much gets along, grows up with each other.

LARRY (42), articulated a different type of response to being an African American male:

Excuse me, for me, it's been a joy, it's a different area of my life, and at the age of 42, it's a different experience and it's an eye opener, something that I always wanted to do. It gives me a joy to wake up in the morning

and come up and go to school and be more of a role model and be positive. It's a positive thing being here at community college.

DANNY (48), talked about his experience from an academic perspective:

What I face right now is the academic challenges of keeping up because I feel that if I went to college when I was 19, it would have been easier. I believe that the younger mind is more open. You see things quicker than I do now. It takes me a little while sometimes when I stand there, but I get it done.

Gil Scott Heron Community College

Distinct from the experiences reported at Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College, the participants in the Gil Scott Heron Community College focus group descriptions of success ranged from negative which included feeling that others questioned whether they belonged in the college at all, to the positive experience of a teacher making a concerted effort during the first two weeks of class to get to know the students. Selected responses include:

BOBBY (23), spoke about images:

People's first perception of me is always negative because I wear dreads, and for people, that's hard. They see dreads, they automatically assume thug (prove them wrong). I mean you never just walk up to somebody and they just totally open up to you, it's like always you got to show . . .

LOUIS (21), offered his experience as an example:

Prove yourself.

BOBBY (23), continued to clarify what the experience was like for him:

Show yourself until they feel welcome, like okay, alright, I kind of know where he is.

AL (19), used the classroom environment as a way to frame his experiences:

I can actually say that in one of my classes, my sociology teacher was actually kind of surprised when I shared with the class on a certain topic, and she was like, really surprised with my answer or whatever, and she was like what type of background are you from, she got really interested, because she didn't know anything about me. She made it her priority to get to know us in the first couple of weeks, while also teaching her curriculum. No teachers really do that, they just basically base you on what they see, and not what is really on the inside.

ADAM (20), was to the point and was problem and issue free:

It's been okay. No problems...no issues.

EDDIE (22), viewed the experience as a manhood thing:

I relate as just being a man, so I don't know.

Focus Group at Count Basie Community College

When asked to describe their experience as an African American male community college student, participants in the Count Basie Community College focus group responses ranged from a negative experience of struggling in math, to positive with a pretty good over all experience. The general tone in the focus group was that the college experience was manageable. Selected examples of responses include:

GREG (30), viewed his experience as an opportunity to undercut prevailing stereotypes of African American males:

You've always got to prove yourself (prove them wrong).

MIKE (44), viewed his experiences more personally:

I am struggling with my math class, but that's about it. I'm doing pretty good in all of my other classes.

MISTER (48), reflected on how he balances college with other life demands:

I think I took too many classes last semester so I cut back this semester.

KINNARD (46), offered this:

So far, so good. I haven't had any problems.

RAKIM (58), seemed pleasantly surprised at how well he was managing:

I'm doing okay. This has been a pretty good experience for me.

Miles Davis Community College

The focus group at Miles Davis Community College presented a consistently positive reporting of their experience as African American male community college students. Most of the responses stated that it was a good experience which included getting good grades and being on the honor roll. Two of the participants seemed to indicate that they felt pressure to do the work, but they also seemed confident that they would get it done. Selected examples of responses include:

RAHEEM (22), plowed ahead, grateful for yet another opportunity to prove himself:

I'm at a point where there's no looking back. I don't really have the

luxury of slipping-this is my second chance (prove them wrong).

MUSTAFA (18), proud of his accomplishments and learning to accept the greater responsibility that attends new freedoms:

College is a lot different than high school in the sense that, there's that sense of freedom, but there's also that sense of responsibility (handle my business). Overall it's been pretty good. I got a 3.4 last semester, basically all A's but just like one C in Spanish, but you know Spanish, you know it's a hard subject for everybody.

NEAL (19), took pride in meeting the increased demands of college:

I kept a schedule, I made sure I did what I needed to do and made sure I got it done on time (handle my business). I had to make sure I was on top of my game.

JAMAL (19), like the others, experienced deep satisfaction from growing increasingly adept at negotiating the rigors of college:

I'm at a point where there's no looking back. I don't really have the luxury of slipping . . . I feel more motivated to do what I have to do (handle my business).

STEVEN (20), took tremendous pride in consistently excelling in academics:

Well, I've been on the honor roll since 7th grade, and I am still on the honor roll, I'm pretty proud of myself because I've been maintaining and getting good grades (handle my business).

Herbie Hancock Community College

The participants at Herbie Hancock Community College described their experience in a qualitatively different manner. Their description of their experience of college took on a reflective tone and represented a description of their experience of themselves including developing a new work ethic and being happy with self. Selected examples of responses include:

WARREN (30), evolved as a man from his resolve to master his fear of math:

It's been a good experience. I learned a lot about myself. It gave me a different type of confidence in addressing things. All of the math I ever learned, I learned it right here because I did not learn a whole lot in high school. I developed a new work ethic from the many challenges that the math presented me because I spent a lot of long days and long nights trying to learn the concepts in Math 060 and 061, Math 064 twice, Math 065 and 071 twice and I'll be taking Math 131 twice. Now I am at the point where I only have to take one more math class and then I graduate (determined).

SAMUEL (23), contrary to others' expectations, applauded himself for succeeding in college:

Before I got to the community college I was always told that I have a disability and college will not enroll me. I have been in college ever since 2000. If I went to a University like M, I would be lost.

Community college gives me the base I need to succeed. I am very happy with where I am now. I broke the barrier that people always told me that I would not be good for college (prove them wrong).

Table 1 presents a summary of what participants said in response to the focus group query regarding their experience in community college.

Table 1.

Summary of Participant Experiences

Focus Group	Describe your experience in community college
Gil Scott Heron	Mixed Experience: Teacher took time to get to know me; Others questioned whether I belonged
Miles Davis	Positive outlook with some pressure
Count Basie	Mixed, yet manageable experience
Charlie Bird Parker	Positive experience
Herbie Hancock	Positive, happy with self, new work ethic

African American Males Identify Success Factors

The second and third stages of the 4-D Process are represented by Dream and Design and are often combined as they were in the current study. During the Dream/Design stage of this study, Critical Race Theory was the component of the theoretical frame used to examine the second research question: How do African American males describe the components that contribute to their success in the community college. Participants were asked the following questions from the focus group protocol: Describe a time when you

feel you performed really well as a community college student; Identify what factors contributed to your success; Who has played a significant role in supporting your academic success; Describe a time when you were proud to be a member of the group of African American men in college and why you were proud; What do you value most about being a member of this group and why; How has racism played a role in your academic achievement and how have you circumvented it; How have you eliminated any obstacles to your academic achievement;

African American Males Describe Their Performance

When participants were asked to describe a time when they felt they performed really well as a community college student, their responses fell generally under the theme of achievement, but covered a range of activities from being on the honor roll for years on end, to simply not quitting school.

Count Basie Community College

At Count Basie Community College, participant responses about their performance in general related to achievement and included accomplishing semester-long goals, getting an A in a class, receiving an award for academic achievement, and displaying skills. Selected examples include:

OLIVER (40), savored the taste of success:

I got my first “A” (achievement).

KINNARD (46), expressed contentment with achieving stated objectives:

I reached the goals that were set at the beginning of the semester (achievement).

KEITH (42), offered concrete evidence of his academic prowess:

I got a Stellar Award for academic achievement (achievement).

RAKIM (58), acknowledged himself:

I displayed skills and performed well (achievement).

MISTER (48), applauded himself:

I completed all of my internship assignments (achievement).

Gil Scott Heron Community College

At Gil Scott Heron Community College, participants also categorized pride related to achievement, but their specific instances varied from the responses given at Count Basie Community College. In this instance, participant responses included their ability to persevere and continue to attend school and not drop out, as well as the decision to even attend college in the first place.

Selected responses include:

BOBBY (23), enjoyed another kind of college success, beyond academics:

I don't think I experienced it yet, but I'm pretty confident about this fashion show, so I guess that's a step in the right direction. I can't stop smiling because I know that in less than 24 hours, there will be a production that I help put together (achievement).

ADAM (20), seemed to live by the edict, showing up is 80 percent of success:

Just coming to school (showing up). I have a thing where if I'm bored or I'm not challenged, I don't care, I mean I'm not going to waste my time with it so the fact that I stayed here last semester and even this semester is just enough for me (achievement).

EDDIE (22), applauded himself for swimming against a negative tide:

At my high school, I had a lot of friends and people I knew that said they weren't going to go to college after school, because of grades or they didn't feel like it so I'm kinda glad, you know that I didn't fall into that category.

Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College

Participant responses in the Charlie "Bird" Parker focus group ranged from doing some of the things minimally necessary to concentrate on studying, like turning off the cell phone, to being so proud about his first A that he reports going home and sharing his experience with his mother, his children, and his buddies.

Selected examples include:

TALIB (19), knowing that some students attempt to skate by, took pleasure in working for and earning good grades:

I was proud of the fact that I actually took the time and read the books and studied and used proper time management skills. I went to Dr. R's office a lot and conversed with him. I turned my phone off so I could get extra study time and I went to the library and used the resources I had at the college. When I got my grades back, I saw that I did pretty well so I felt pretty good (achievement).

DANNY (48), pleased to have stumbled upon a subject he has a talent for:

When I got here I did not know exactly what I wanted to do, but I have had about three or four music classes so far and I got A's in every last one of them (achievement).

LARRY (42), surprisingly discovered he had a gift for writing:

I had to do a paper, on a place you would rather be. I got the paper back and I got an A on it, and I was so proud I went home and I showed my mom and my kids and everything, and they were proud of me too, and my buddies were proud of me (achievement).

Miles Davis Community College

At Miles Davis Community College, participants also presented a range of responses, but placed emphasis on showing up consistently in college representing an experience that made them proud. Selected examples of responses follow:

JAMAL (18), implicitly contrasted his decision to attend college with less productive places he might have been:

I think just being here (showing up) is one of my biggest successes because it was a point in time where I didn't know what I was going to do and I found more purpose in doing what I can do now to the best of my ability, so I'm really proud of that (purpose).

MUSTAFA (18), echoing the sentiments of fellow African American male students, surprised himself by defying the stereotypes:

I've been on the honor roll in the 3.0s and I guess I am pretty proud of myself and just you know as a African American, I'm proud of myself, you know because like, you know what they say about us and stuff, it's just crazy but I'm proud of myself that I kept it up through high school and then I'm still going through college with the 3.4s, so good.

NEAL (18), offered his inspiration for succeeding in academics:

My brother's grades weren't so good, he's kind of like the opposite of me in everything, and I just didn't want to do the things that he did, like you know, get suspended and all that stuff, getting into trouble like that, so I just wanted to do the opposite, so that motivated me to do the opposite and just you know, focus on my grades and focus on what I had to do.

Herbie Hancock Community College

Similarly, participants in the focus group at Herbie Hancock community college indicated that showing up to college represented a moment of success for which they were proud. Sample responses are below:

WARREN (30), seemingly in direct response to the prevailing stereotype that African American men don't attend college offered:

Each day I return (showing up) to this campus represents a moment of success because my ultimate success is to get my Associates Degree...even the failures were part of my success (achievement)

SAMUEL (23), credited his success to tenacity and a valued relationship with a longtime mentor:

The time when I was successful was when I got an "A". I was blown away by that. I realized that I put all of my time and effort in that class. I let nothing stand in my way. It was my second time taking that class and I was not taking it again, because I hate math and math hates me. I boxed out all the things that were taking my focus away from math—my friends, etc. (achievement). Another thing that inspired me was

Dr. A. (mentor/advisor). I have known Dr. A. since my freshman year in high school (1994). We know each other like a book...I could talk to him about anything. Anytime I need something or to talk about a problem, he understands. I have two tutors who work with me, but they do not understand me as well as Dr. A understands me. He has been a big influence in my life to continue my college education.

Table 2 presents a summary of what participants said in response to the focus group query regarding a time when participants performed really well as a community college student.

Table 2.

Summary of Participant Performance

Focus Group	Summary of Responses
Gil Scott Heron	Being in college, just showing up
Miles Davis	Showing up, GPA
Count Basie	Award, First A, Completed Assignments, Reached My Goals,
Charlie Bird Parker	Achievement, being focused, getting an "A"
Herbie Hancock	Just showing up, even the "failures" were part of the successes

African American Males Define Success

When participants were asked to define success, the range of responses included activities such as accomplishing goals, completing tasks,

getting good grades, maintaining a high grade point average, and being a positive role model to others. Overall, achievement was the prevailing theme to emerge from the responses to this query.

Gil Scott Heron Community College

At Gil Scott Heron Community College, the focus group responses to this query ranged from achieving a single goal, to continual goal setting and accomplishment throughout the lifespan. Sample responses follow:

BOBBY (23), defined success simply:

To achieve a set goal and be happy with the product (achievement).

BLAIR (22), passionately charted and built on his success:

For me, if I set a goal it's not just a one-step goal. My goals are goals that keep on growing, so if I get to one stage, yeah I'm going to get to two. So success for me is the ability to accomplish a goal and then set a new achievement level for myself (achievement).

EDDIE (22), suggested that success breeds success:

Like being able to keep on going, and best yourself, so if I graduate from here I can get my AA, well then I'm going to go to a four year university and get my BA, and then from then on I'm going to go get my masters, and then my PhD and whatever else I need to get, and if I get my PhD in one topic, maybe I'll go back to school and study another subject or something like that, just keep going on, enriching yourself and bettering yourself, because even though you know you might not get paid for everything that you've learned or whatever, you just have the

satisfaction of knowing that during my life, I did this, this, this and this, I became who I am because what I went through and what I learned, and achieved enlightenment, which in life you just have to learn, and it's a never ending story about what you have to learn, and if you get to a point where you're a successful adult, who has been through school, knows more about everything, not just one culture or one set of mind, but of basically how the whole world is, and what your role is in the whole world, that's your success right there (achievement).

KALIF (23), echoed a fellow student's approach to achievement:

I agree with what Eddie said—meet your goals, and then also at the same time say: Alright, I have success, but I just have to go further and further. So after this, I'm going to go to a four year, and then, keep going after that (achievement).

ADAM (20), offered his view:

I define success as—it doesn't have to be big to me. Success could be just making me happy (joy). If I do my homework and I know that I could have sat there and watched TV or played a game, or I get an A on a test, like that's successful to me, that's just a stepping stone to where I have to be later on in life (achievement).

Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College

Similarly to the Gil Scott Heron focus group, the Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College focus group defined success as reaching goals. Sample responses are listed below:

TALIB (19), shared his view:

If you have a goal and you meet it—that's success right there. As long you handle it; you're successful (achievement).

DANNY (48), measured success by how he feels:

Success to me is being happy and content whatever I do (joy).

LARRY (42), anchored his success in the ability to positively impact the lives of others:

Success to me is being able to do or achieve anything you can without anyone stopping you (prove them wrong). Being a good role model to young ones (my brother's keeper). I think being a big brother and being a role model to a young African—try a young man period, that's a big success for me, and that's something I'm trying to do. I'm setting the example, not only for my boys but for other young men that's around my community, by being my age [42] and going back to school to finish up. It gives me joy to wake up in the morning, go to school (achievement).

Count Basie Community College

Additionally, the Count Basie Community College focus group also defined success as setting and achieving goals, and they added mindset as an ingredient for success. Sample responses are listed below:

RAKIM (58), viewed discipline and follow through as important:

So its setting goals and doing all you can to reach those goals like planning out a schedule, or having things you write down to help you achieve your goals (achievement).

MISTER (48), offered that it's not simply outcomes but ones resolve:

It has a lot to do with the individual mindset (frame of mind), and you have to be determined to know how to reach those goals, and that's what I see as success (achievement).

OLIVER (40), asserted that achievement is mental and emotional first:

I think success is in the mind, you know, you have to be prepared to be successful, and you'll be successful (frame of mind).

Miles Davis Community College

At Miles Davis Community College, focus group participants indicated that success not only includes setting and reaching goals, but specifically knowing what steps are required to reach the goals and taking those steps.

Selected responses are listed below:

JAMAL (18), stated it simply:

I think setting your goals and achieving them is success (achievement).

MUSTAFA (18), concluded that it's not simply the outcome but effort that counts:

Just focus on what you like to do, make sure you just apply yourself to everything, and don't slack off, and then you'll feel much better about yourself and academic standing (achievement).

NEAL (18), echoed the belief that goal setting is key to achievement:

I believe success is setting these goals and knowing what it takes to reach these goals, and then actually doing that (achievement).

Herbie Hancock Community College

At Herbie Hancock, the focus group participants responded to the query with definitions of success that ranged from completing something, once started, to obtaining a degree and getting a job. Sample responses are listed below:

WARREN (30), offered his view on success:

My definition of success includes having a college degree, a white collar job and my ability to make other people successful (achievement).

SAMUEL (23), articulated what fuels his desire to secure a degree:

My definition of success is that nothing will stop me from achieving (desire) what I set my mind to do. Fear of failure and the fear of not achieving success in life also motivate me. I come from a family where everyone has degrees and if I don't get my degree, will I be letting my family down? So it pretty much starts with that.

FRANKLIN (18), shared his simplistic definition of success:

Success for me is finishing something once I start it.

Table 3 represents a summary of participant responses to the focus group query regarding their definition of success as a community college student.

Table 3.

Summary of Participant Success

Focus Group	Summary of Responses
Gil Scott Heron	Accomplish goals
Miles Davis	Apply self, setting, knowing, doing
Count Basie	Setting and achieving goals
Charlie Bird Parker	Reaching goals, joy
Herbie Hancock	Finishing what I started, white collar job

African American Males Identify Factors that Contributed to Their Success

When asked to identify what factors contributed to their success, participant responses covered a range which included family, frame of mind, and drive, but the theme that emerged most consistently amongst participants and between colleges included the importance of having a relationship with a person at the college in the role of a mentor or advisor who could provide guidance, advice, and assistance in navigating the terrain of the institution.

Count Basie Community College

In the Count Basie Community College focus group, participant responses ranged from family support to individual desire as being the factors that contributed to success for the African American male community college student. Sample responses are listed below:

MISTER (48), suggested that exposure, at any age, can lead to greater success:

Having Mr. L there gave me the interest in things I didn't even know

about and inspired a passion (advisor/mentor).

GREG (30), credited a persistent parent as key to his attending college:

My dad always, keeps drumming on it, you know, education, education, education (family).

KINNARD (48), awakened, he said, to the possibility that college offers:

All my life I've been the student who comes back with a report card that says: has more potential can do better, and basically that was because I had no interest in school work most of my life. Recently I realized that this is a big opportunity I have and I should take advantage of it (frame of mind).

OLIVER (40), declined to claim just attending college as a success:

It is very important to reach a certain level in education before you can be called a successful person. This is the highest I've been so far. I want to go higher (desire).

Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College

In contrast, at the Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College, participants were consistent in their response that the factor which contributed to their success was an advisor or mentor. Sample responses are listed below:

LARRY (42), shared that, among other factors, supportive relationships are key:

Coach and Mr. R. (advisor/mentor); definitely having time management capabilities and skills, have a schedule, write down stuff that you need to do, when you need to do it, and when it needs to be finished, so you can get it done, and be effective (handle my business).

DANNY (48), recognized that there is value in being well connected to people:

Being at the right place at the right time (luck). It even is who you know, because depending on who you know you might be able to do different things, or have access to different things that you might need. The mentors here helped me a lot (advisor/mentor).

TALIB (19), offered that there are a myriad of factors that contribute to his success:

Mr. O (advisor/mentor) and being in the book club played a huge role for me (program). That plus a lot of encouragement on the side of my parents (parents), determination (determined) on my part, and developing finances (monetary).

Miles Davis Community College

In contrast, Miles Davis Community College participants primarily responded that family was the factor that most contributed to their success.

Sample responses are below:

NEAL (18), viewed family as pivotal to his success in college:

My mom, she's very well educated, and she helped me (family). I also have good relationships with teachers in college and that helped me too (advisor/mentor). I guess my brother (family), his grades weren't so good, he's kind of like the opposite of me in everything, and I just didn't want to do the things that he did. So that motivated me to do the opposite and just you know, focus on my grades and focus on what I had to do (handle my business).

MUSTAFA (18), shared that his single mother is the key to his resiliency:

My mother (family). She's a really brilliant woman, but she never got to finish college because she had me when she was 22. She's a single parent and I think that for a lot of reasons, I may be a lot stronger than some of my peers, because I had to go through a lot more and because of it I'm going to be ready for the long road I have ahead of me (state of mind).

JAMAL (18), echoed others' sentiment, and added:

I would have to agree with what they said except for me it was my dad. Pretty much he has always told me to do my best in school. I didn't always listen though, but now I'm on it (family).

Herbie Hancock Community College

Herbie Hancock Community College focus group participants were similar in their responses to the Charlie "Bird" Parker focus group in that the majority of the respondents indicated that an advisor or mentor was the major factor contributing to their success. Examples follow:

SAMUEL (23), factored in his relationship with mentors:

The factor that contributes to my success is that I care about my future (state of mind). Being an African American male, people put a label on you that you are not going to make it (prove them wrong). Another thing that inspired me was Dr. A. I have known Dr. A since my freshman year in High School (1994). I could go to him about anything. Anytime I need something or to talk about a problem, he understands. I

have two tutors who work with me, but they do not understand me as well as Dr. A understands me. He has been a big influence in my life (advisor/mentor).

WARREN (30), shared he relies upon available resources, including human:

Any sources—labs, tutors (programs), Dr. A (advisor/mentor), having the monetary support of my family has made the difference for me (family).

FRANLIN (18), had this to share:

Mr. G., my freshman advisor has helped me out a lot. I even changed my major because he helped me to see a better career for myself (advisor/mentor).

Gil Scott Heron Community College

Gil Scott Heron focus group participants, on the other hand had a range of responses which included a supportive advisor in addition to peer connections.

Selected examples are listed below:

EDDIE (22), stated that a sibling motivates him:

I would have to say something entirely outside school-like my brother. No matter what, he looks up to me for some reason. I've messed up a lot in my life and no matter what I do, he still thinks of ways that I could be better, no matter what it is. He got into a great school and the first person he called was me—to let me know about it. If he needed help with anything he'll call me. So I just believe from that alone, it's alright—someone believes in me man, I know I can do better

(my brother's keeper).

BOBBY (23), articulated his view this way:

Having advisors like Dr. B. and Ms R. (advisor/mentor) that get straightforward answers and that help to get things done, plus a lot of behind the scenes help from my friends (supportive peers).

KALIF (23), also touted the generous support of mentors:

I had a big problem getting a couple of my books, and Dr. B. got me some books that I needed. Without those I probably would have failed the course (advisor/mentor).

LOUIS (21), articulated what drives his passion to succeed:

You're going to always have people that say, you're only going to community college. I take that like a kind of a push, to prove to them that even though I just went to Community College, I'm still going to better myself and I'm going to do good with my life. I'm going to be better than whatever you're expecting (prove them wrong). I'm going to be an achiever (achievement).

DON (22), had this to say about his journey:

It started out as a vision, then a will to want to do it, then the determination to complete it, and then the drive to pull it all together and get it done (handle my business).

AL (19), articulated his view on the purpose of life and success:

We all come to this world and everybody does different things in their life. I think what we're all meant to do is just to make our own little

difference in the world, just to be able to say that I did this in my lifetime and I'm happy that I did this in my lifetime (purpose). Just being able to say, in four years I'm going to graduate from college and write that down. If somebody tries to hold you back, just keep persevering, and being persistent with it and just being able to push through everything like a steam locomotive and make it to the destination, so that they know that you're serious about your education and your future (prove them wrong).

ADAM (20), echoed his fellow students, and added:

Just like what he's saying, knock hard an awful lot on that door, somebody's going to open up, so just keep knocking, eventually somebody's going to get annoyed and open the door for you (determined).

Table 4 includes a summary of participant responses concerning the factors that contribute to their success as community college students.

Table 4

Summary of Factors that Contribute to Success

Focus Group	Summary of Responses
Gil Scott Heron	Advisor, peers, prove them wrong
Miles Davis	Advisor, family
Count Basie	Advisor, family, mindset
Charlie Bird Parker	Advisor
Herbie Hancock	Advisor

Participants were asked to describe a time when they were proud to be a member of the group of African American men in college and what they valued most about being a member of this group. My brother's keeper and I am somebody were the themes that emerged from the varied participant responses.

Count Basie Community College

At Count Basie Community College, participants responded with a range of responses that included my brother's keeper and I am somebody, among others. Selected responses are listed below:

KINNARD (46), had this to say about pride in belonging:

I was part of a mentoring group at my field agency (mentoring). We were empowering youth and I was proud to be a positive example and model to others (my brother's keeper).

KEITH (42), articulated his experience this way:

I was in the First Steps to College Program which helped older black men attend college (program resource). I was proud of having the opportunity to advance myself and having membership in the group (I am somebody).

GREG (30), took pride in the successes of other Black men:

Just seeing Black men in my college classes being successful academically (I am somebody). I was proud to see Black men to go against the stigma daily and dispelling the myth (I am somebody).

RAKIM (58), had this to say about his moment of pride in belonging:

Attended my first veterans workshop made up of predominantly

African American men (my brother's keeper). I was proud of the diversity of the group—even though we are all Black (I am somebody).

Gil Scott Heron Community College

At Gil Scott Heron Community College, participant responses ranged from I am somebody, and my brother's keeper, to prove them wrong. Selected responses are indicated below:

KALIF (23), had this to say about witnessing the success of other Black males:

These two black males right here, when they started up the fashion show. To have two black males to start an organization like that, and to have it go through, I'm proud of that (my brother's keeper).

EDDIE (22), expressed pride in not belonging to the Black male dropout group:

I'm proud to be an African American male in college across the world, because I can honestly say coming from Newark, New Jersey, I honestly think I am the only one of pretty much thirty friends growing up who has a high school diploma and is still in school (I am somebody). I guess I could be proud of everybody that comes from that same community across Oklahoma, and California, etc (my brother's keeper).

AL (19), shared the hope that his success would inspire others to aspire:

Yeah, just knowing what some of my friends are doing back in my old neighborhood makes me feel like I owe it to somebody that I made it out—I owe it back to the community I came from and hopefully by me doing something right, they could possibly look at me, and progress on

their own (role model).

DON (22), echoed a familiar response:

I'm proud to be in this group 'cause we are going against the people who said we couldn't make it (prove them wrong). Maybe we could also inspire somebody to get back into school and get to where they need to be because I know where I need to be (role model).

LOUIS (21), had this to add:

I think that everybody can make it. Every black male isn't a failure (I am somebody). We can do it as black males and they can do it too. I mean everybody can do it—I mean why can't everybody eat and be successful (determined).

Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College

The participants in the Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College Focus Group provided responses that fell into the my brother's keeper and role model categories. Selected examples of their responses are listed below:

LARRY (42), reflected on his satisfaction in discovering he wasn't alone:

Well for me, just being in this school around African Americans who want to do the right thing, trying to be positive role models, that means much to me (my brother's keeper). That tells me that I'm not the only one out there trying to make a difference, and trying to be a role model and trying to make a change (role model). When I heard about the book club (program resource) there was no second thoughts about it, I was right here, first one in line, I think, I'm not sure, but, I was proud

that I knew other black African American men who had that same kind of interests I had, and that made me proud of just being here, getting to know them (my brother's keeper).

KODY (30), shared his experience this way:

One of my proudest moments is, being part of the African American book club (program resource) and being around those Nubians who are bibliophiles and are independent (my brother's keeper). They think for themselves. I felt good about that.

DANNY (48), placed his experience in a historical context:

Our experiences are a little different than young kids now. We were so close to slavery that our grandfathers would tell us the stories about how to grind it out and how to make it, and how you can be a man, and how you can do this and that which were very important in shaping us as black men (roots).

Miles Davis Community College

At Miles Davis Community College, participant responses fell principally into the My Brother's Keeper category. Selected responses are included below:

NEAL (18), expressed satisfaction in seeing Black men in leadership roles:

I just found out that the student government here at Miles College is mostly African American men (I am somebody). I was really proud to think that African American men can lead this college to a better place (my brother's keeper).

JAMAL (18), took pleasure in contradicting the negative stereotypes:

The way I am, I'm just proud to be black anyway, so just going to college (I am somebody). Whenever I do something or accomplish something that we're stereotypically told that we cannot accomplish, I'm proud (proved them wrong).

MUSTAFA (18), articulated a common source of pride:

I think it's amazing that there are a lot of African Americans that are in college now, and it's a good thing to see people there, that are interested in education. It feels good to be a part of that group, and I think that the percentage of African Americans that are in college is going to keep going higher, because the more people that are educated when they have children, they are going to try to make those children see the value of education (my brother's keeper).

RAHEEM (22), had this to say about his experience:

What I value most about it is it's a small group, compared to the national population, from what I've been taught, it seems like it's a group that already has some strikes against it. The greatest thing about this group is that when we do go forward and achieve the things that whoever says we can't, it's a great thing (prove them wrong). I think it's something to really be proud of, especially when you have already, just to be born in this world, to have so much adversity and everything else against you, and be able to accomplish a lot of things. We have a really great history (I am somebody). There are a lot of great black men that have done a lot of great things, and to just look

back on those types of things and say, well since they did it we can do it too, and it's really amazing to me (my brother's keeper).

STEVEN (20), expressed gratitude for exposure to other achievers:

I value the fact that I can go to college, learn that there's other African American men like me, around me, doing the same thing I'm doing (my brother's keeper).

Herbie Hancock Community College

In contrast to the Miles Davis Community College focus group, the Herbie Hancock Community College focus group offered a broader variety of responses to this question. Participant responses from this focus group covered a range which included prove them wrong, I am somebody, and my brother's keeper. Selected responses are listed below:

ANDY (19), articulated a familiar sentiment of Black college males:

I like almost everything about being an African American in college (I am somebody). I take joy in proving people wrong and I feel that being an African American in college and being interested in education, I've proved a lot of people wrong (prove them wrong). I also think that as African Americans in college we're going to empower the African American population a great deal. It doesn't just stop here, when we graduate from college, and if we transfer to a university, and graduate from there, we're going to be helping the community (my brother's keeper).

WARREN (30), had this to say about his experience:

Every day I come to this campus I am proud to be an African American man in college (just showing up). You do not see too many of us on this campus at least. I like to know that by me providing my perspective in my classes I have influenced some people who have held stereotypes (prove them wrong).

SAMUEL (23), expressed his satisfaction this way:

I was the only African American man in my English class and I thought to myself that I am here for a reason. It made me feel proud because I was learning what everybody else was learning (I am somebody). I was there to get an education. I never stopped (determined).

Table 5 includes a summary of participant responses to the focus group questions regarding their experience of being proud to be a member of the group of African American men in college.

Table 5.

Summary of Pride

Focus Group	Summary of Responses
Gil Scott Heron	My brother's keeper, role model
Miles Davis	My brother's keeper, I am somebody
Count Basie	My brother's keeper, I am somebody, program resources
Charlie Bird Parker	My brother's keeper, role model
Herbie Hancock	My brother's keeper, I am somebody, prove them wrong

African American Males Discuss the Impact of Racism

Participants were asked how has racism played a role in their academic achievement and how they have circumvented it. The codes in the responses ranged from feeling persecuted to an outright questioning of whether racism exists, which defined the theme which emerged from this query as post race consciousness.

Count Basie Community College

At Count Basie Community College, focus group participants gave responses that ranged from feeling persecuted to not experiencing negative racial treatment while in college. Selected example follow:

OLIVER (40), believed teachers singled him out because of his race:

I went to a catholic school, and I was probably only one of the four black people that went to that school, so my teacher basically was getting on me the whole time, even though I was one of the smartest kids in his class, he still basically kind of failed me. They would actually intentionally fail me, and they had no reason for it (persecuted).

KEITH (42), believed he was negatively labeled because he challenged history:

My experience of racism in education has always been in science classes because my grandmother embedded in me the things that African Americans invented and I always ran into fights with my science teacher because it wasn't in the books that they make us use. But when I backed it up with proof of the origin of the invention I was considered radical, a trouble-maker (radical). When asked why are you pushing this agenda? I

would answer the way my grandmother put it to me: If you don't have any pride in yourself and in what your people have done, then who will? (I am somebody)

GREG (30), articulated his experience on a largely African American campus:

Since there's mostly Black people here, I haven't had any discrimination or hate from any of the faculty or the students here (post race).

Gil Scott Heron Community College

In contrast to Count Basie Community College, participants in the Gil Scott Heron Community College focus group consistently responded by indicating that racism was not part of their collegiate experience. Selected examples of responses are listed below:

LOUIS (21), set a tone that resounds through this focus group:

I wouldn't say racism (post race).

ADAM (20), placed assumptions about Black males outside of race discrimination:

I wouldn't say racism (post race). I'd say like more of a stereotype, they automatically write us off saying: he's going to be a failure, a comedian, a class clown, a thug, a gang banger or whatever. We can do the same amount of work or even better than the other kids in the classroom, so I wouldn't say racism, I would say stereotypes.

KALIF (23), echoed the sentiments of other focus group members:

Stereotypes (post race). The first thing I think is the pushing, I had classes with predominately white people, and like we'd come into class,

they're looking, and wondering: Does he look the part? What is he going to do? But that pushes me to do more work, and study (prove them wrong).

AL (19), asserted that an instructor graded his writing based on his race:

I wouldn't call it necessarily racism (post race) but when I'm in a classroom of predominately white people, when they hand in their paper, and they get an A, but then I hand in a paper that's A quality, it's scrutinized, and gets criticized a lot more. The professors ask themselves the question: Did he actually do this—is he capable of doing something like that? If I get an A paper, it might come back a B+, but it's still an A paper, but because I might have been missing a comma, or she don't necessarily believe that I did it, or somebody probably went over it and did this and somebody probably did that for him. Sometimes they don't give you the respect you deserve (prove them wrong). We're all in college—you can't just look at me and tell me that I'm nobody, or I'm nothing (I am somebody). I'm an African American male in college that came up from nothing, so you can't tell me that I'm still nothing and I'm in college now. How are you going to look me in my face and tell me that and scrutinize my work?! I'm capable of doing the same thing as everybody else (I am somebody).

EDDIE (22), echoed the oppressive nature of negative stereotyping:

That's basically the stereotype (post race). It doesn't matter what you do to try to change it, you're always going to get scrutinized, if you're black.

DON (22), questioned the existence of racism:

I wouldn't necessarily call it racism (post race). More like stereotypes. I don't necessarily believe that racism really exists, I think that it's the way you were brought up, and what they, and not even what they actually know about you, but about what they think they know about an individual, and that's how they base their judgment and how they react to certain things (prove them wrong).

BLAIR (22), expressed the desire to be judged as an individual:

It's always the whole you've got to prove yourself thing (prove them wrong). I want something better in my life, I don't want to be in that one spot all the time, I don't want to be criticized. I'm just me, people need to see people for that, like that person is that person, don't judge one person by a race (I am somebody).

Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College

In contrast, although the participant responses did not all indicate that racism was experienced, the participants at Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College focus group did not deny that racism was an issue to the extent that the participants in the Gill Scott Heron Community College focus group did. These responses ranged from prove them wrong, to I am somebody. Selected responses follow:

TALIB (19), articulated a commitment to rise above prevailing racial stereotypes:

In high school I have had some close encounters with some teachers who said 'All these niggers--these kids can never learn how to add, so why

should we care?', and I was just appalled by that. I couldn't find words for it. I felt I had to get my education so that's why I'm here now (prove them wrong). This is my first step (I am somebody).

LARRY (42), recognized the existence of racism but adds:

When I think about it, racism is still there, but it's just hidden now. It can't stop me from doing what I want to do anyway (determined). If you can press the bar, press on it, and just keep on moving, it can't stop you, you can do anything you want. The worst fear for a Caucasian person is a black educated man (I am somebody). I believe in it, and that's one of my goals, just to get the most education I can while I'm here (determined).

DANNY (48), stated that education counters race discrimination:

Education is important because it keeps people from underestimating you and you have to be educated to even know something like that (prove them wrong).

Miles Davis Community College

Similar to the Gil Scott Heron Community College focus group, participants in the Miles Davis Community College focus group gave responses that were primarily categorized as post-race consciousness. Selected examples of responses are listed below:

MUSTAFA (18), made a distinction between direct and indirect racism:

Well, I've never—I can't honestly say that I've ever had to face racism directly (post race). I might have been indirectly but I've always been able to work my way around those types of things.

NEAL (18), shared that indirect racism can be difficult to detect:

I haven't really faced any direct racism (post race). Indirect racism, you can notice that several times, but you can't be 100% sure that that's a display of racism. Sometimes I've seen surprise on some people's faces. It probably was because they were surprised that someone like me could do that. It always just makes me want to work harder. So academically, it will affect you in that sense because you'll want to work harder to prove them wrong (prove them wrong).

JAMAL (18), asserted that racism is not an issue for him:

I haven't really encountered like racism and stuff like that, but I did go to a mostly white school but that didn't have any affect on me (post race).

Herbie Hancock Community College

Similarly, participants in the Herbie Hancock Community College focus group gave responses that consistently were categorized as post-race consciousness. Selected examples are listed below:

SAMUEL (23), decided that racism has not been a part of his college experience:

I have not experienced any racism (post race).

WARREN (30), had this to say about double consciousness and racism:

I don't think I experienced any (post race). When I walk into a room I am always aware with the double consciousness that W.E.B. Du Bois talks about—when white people do not have to be aware in that way.

Sometimes, especially when you learn about history of the United States

or African American history up until about 10 years ago, a lot of times what you were taught was not always exactly what happened.

FRANKLIN (18), shared that he has not experienced racism:

People have been pretty cool with me. Basically, I don't have problems with anybody (post race).

Table 6 represents a summary of participant responses when asked to articulate how has racism played a role in their academic achievement and how they have circumvented it.

Table 6. Summary of Experience of Racism

Focus Group	Summary of Responses
Gil Scott Heron	Post race consciousness
Miles Davis	Post race consciousness
Count Basie	I am somebody
Charlie Bird Parker	I am somebody
Herbie Hancock	Post race consciousness

African American Males Discuss Eliminating Obstacles

Participants were asked to discuss how they have eliminated any obstacles to their academic achievement. The theme which emerged from their responses to this query indicated that the participants took responsibility for handling their business.

Gil Scott Heron Community College

The participants in the Gil Scott Heron Community College focus group responded to this query by giving responses that were evenly categorized between handle my business and prove them wrong.

BOBBY (23), articulated a commitment to succeeding, in spite of:

I just do them; everyone is expecting me to fail regardless, so why don't you prove them wrong, don't prove them right (prove them wrong).

AL (19), took pleasure in defying expectations:

There's nothing better than being able to laugh at the people who have in your lifetime been saying you can't do this (prove the wrong).

BLAIR (22), decided to make education a priority:

Quit work so I can do this school thing, do homework (handle my business).

KALIF (23), had this to say about overcoming obstacles:

Just did them (handle my business).

Count Basie Community College

Similarly to the participants in the Gil Scott Heron Community College focus group, participants in the Count Basie Community College focus group gave responses that were categorized as handle my business as well as other responses that were categorized as my brother's keeper and culture of success.

Selected examples of responses are listed below:

GREG (30), said he is inspired by the tenacity of other achieving Black males:

Seeing Black men going against the stigma daily, helps to motivate me

to do my best (culture of success).

KINNARD (46), inspired by a self-help book, put college in a new light:

I read this book: *Awakening the Giant Within* by Anthony Robbins and it helped me to see that my entire college experience has been a second chance for me so I have had to take it seriously (handle my business).

OLIVER (40), shared that commitment is a key component:

By being successful academically, I was able to turn a negative situation into a positive situation, so by doing what I had to do, I was able to overcome any obstacle (handle my business).

KEITH (42), credited his desire to positively impact the lives of others:

Striving to be a positive example and model to others (my brother's keeper).

Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College

The participants in the Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College focus group consistently responded to this query with statements that were categorized as handle my business. Selected responses are listed below:

TALIB (19), shared that he prioritizes and sets clear, firm boundaries:

I have had to make the sacrifice telling female friends: I can't talk to you that late at night—I have to study or eliminate hanging on the block with male friends who were not applying their intelligence to something positive. So if I tell them I have school, I'll talk to you later (handle my business).

DANNY (48), recognized his weaknesses as he proactively addresses them:

Math is not my forte. I don't have a math class this semester but I'm getting tutored for math so you know I'm preparing myself so I'll be able when I take math, but that's how I do it, I just study, I have to take some tutoring classes, and get study groups, and constantly bother my teacher over and over again trying to find out what I did wrong (handle my business).

LARRY (42), shared a commitment to forgoing indulgences for education:

I guess one thing I sacrifice is a lot of TV time, and I cut back on coaching a little so I have some study time (handle my business).

KODY (30), echoed a familiar theme among focus group members, assuming full responsibility for self and success:

I don't have class today and I'm here, not because of the African American book club, because I got work I got to do. If I wasn't interested in getting my work done on my day off, I wouldn't be here, so I'm here. I'm back in the computer lab I need to get busy (handle my business).

Miles Davis Community College

At Miles Davis Community College, focus group participants split their responses evenly between the handle my business and mindset categories.

Selected responses are listed below:

JAMAL (18), had this to say about his responsibility for his experience:

Well, my biggest obstacle has always been myself. A lot of times they say that your biggest enemy is yourself (frame of mind). I had to stop not

doing what I was supposed to do, and do what I was supposed to do
(handle my business).

MUSTAFA (18), also recognized the role his thinking has played:

I can relate to what he's saying, about yourself being your greatest
obstruction, I think that applied to me too (frame of mind). That's probably
the major obstacle I've had so far.

NEAL (18), pinpointed self-destructive patterns:

Mine would be procrastination and time management. I had to get
over it. I can't procrastinate any more. I have to do it when it needs
to be done (handle my business).

Herbie Hancock Community College

Participants in the Herbie Hancock Community College focus group
gave responses that indicated that they believed having the right mindset was
the most important factor for eliminating obstacles. Selected participant
responses are listed below:

WARREN (30), expressed a recurring belief, self-management is fundamental:

The best way to do that is preparation. I try to be prepared for what
comes (frame of mind).

SAMUEL (23), echoed the belief that strength of mind trumps external negative
forces:

It's up to you whether or not you're going to do it or not (frame of mind).

FRANKLIN (18), shared a tactic for cultivating a success mindset:

The biggest thing for me is that I have restructured my time, and

eliminated 'I can't do it' words from my vocabulary (handle my business).

Table 7 represents a summary of participant responses to the focus group query how have you eliminated any obstacles to your academic achievement.

Table 7

Summary of Overcoming Obstacles

Focus Group	Summary of Responses
Gil Scott Heron	Handle my business, prove them wrong
Miles Davis	Handle my business, mindset
Count Basie	Handle my business
Charlie Bird Parker	Handle my business
Herbie Hancock	Mindset

African American Males Describe Future Success

In the fourth and final stage of the 4-D process called Destiny, critical pedagogy provided the component of the theoretical frame used to examine the third research question: How do African American males articulate the ideal conditions that promote their success. Participants were presented with the last two focus group queries: what needs to be done in community college to help African American males to be more successful academically; and finally, participants were instructed to a provocative proposition, which is a statement about an idealized version of their future based on past experiences of success.

Empowering African American Males for Success

When asked what needs to be done in community college to help African American males be more successful academically, participant responses ranged from a distinct emphasis on internal achievement motivation to an appreciation of the benefits received from both participating in a program designed to assist them and seeing other African American males who were equally motivated to be successful. Selected participant responses are highlighted below:

Count Basie Community College

At Count Basie Community College, focus group participants responded to the query with a range of responses that included program resource, culture of success, and mindset. Selected responses are listed below:

KEITH (42), had this to say about his experience in a supportive program:

First, you should have something like the Bridge Learning Community. If I didn't get into Bridge, I would have fumbled. Bridge afforded me learning and guidance. It built my self-esteem and confidence (program resource).

KINNARD (48), expressed a desire to see academic achievers celebrated:

It should start at the middle school level where we have seminars set up for minorities to see the benefits of attending higher education: instead of Michael Jordan—how about the professor from his college; instead of the baggy pants boys with the medallions show the success on the corner, how about those of us who have had some success at a higher level visiting the same corners (culture of success).

OLIVER (40), believes that the Black male must cultivate a mindset of success:

I don't know what the college can do. I think it is up to the individual to be ready to move in a positive direction in his life. I know before I changed the way I looked at life, it didn't matter what anybody tried to do to help me, I would fight against it (mindset).

Gil Scott Heron Community College

The participants in the Gil Scott Heron Community College focus group gave responses that focused on the perception of the community college.

Selected responses are listed below:

EDDIE (22), had this to say about what more the community college can do:

Don't ask for Black on the application. What's your nationality? Why does it matter? (racism)

BOBBY (23), articulated a displeasure with ranking the community college experience as inferior:

Just don't make it seem like community colleges are less than a university and don't make it seem that I'm less worthy because I go to a community college. Just be happy that I'm going to college (I am somebody).

Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College

In contrast, to the responses given at Gil Scott Heron Community College, the participants in the Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College focus group gave responses that ranged from the individual's mindset to the importance of role models. Selected responses are listed below:

TALIB (19), envisioned a educational climate, created by students, that breeds success:

If more students have the mentality and the mindset of education first and everything else later, we'd have a support system and we could be going to the library and studying in groups. I think 90% of the students would have a better outlook on education, and things would be better (culture of success).

DANNY (48), talked about the power of seeing others who have succeeded:

Well, for me, it's positive role models (role models).

LARRY (42), encouraged the increase in resources, but adds:

And that might, I'll use me for example, when I latch onto something, and I enjoy it, I'm a promoter of it. I say hey man, you know the book club meets once a month (program resource). Call the house here, wherever, you know and always get you something to eat, if you don't have lunch. But the onus is on the individual (desire).

KODY (30), echoed a recurring sentiment, regardless of externals, ones mindset determines success or failure:

I don't think teachers could do anything with that, you have to come here and you have to want that, you have to want that, that stuff is on you (mindset).

Miles Davis Community College

At Miles Davis Community College, focus group participants gave responses that not only were more concrete than the previous focus group

responses, the responses were specifically tailored to program resource and monetary support. Selected responses are outlined below:

NEAL (18), shared his program suggestions:

I think we should have some type of maybe transition program to help students take matters more seriously (program resource).

JAMAL (18), had this to say about supporting success:

With that mini-transition (program resource), you can also put some money up in there, college is very expensive, mostly when it comes to books, buying books is crazy (monetary support).

MUSTAFA (18), suggested making education more affordable:

Probably with awareness they should enlighten people with the advantages of education (frame of mind). In many cases people are paying for their own education, so if you could have made it a little more affordable for people (monetary support).

Herbie Hancock Community College

The responses given at Herbie Hancock Community College focus group were the most comprehensive of all the focus group responses.

Participants outlined a detailed program for the retention of African American male students that was particularly well crafted. Selected participant responses are highlighted below:

SAMUEL (23), placed the onus of succeeding in college on the Black male:

It's not the community college, it's up to the individual. It was my choice to come here and get an education to better myself (mindset).

WARREN (30), offered well considered programmatic changes:

Somebody could start some type of outreach group (program resource) that consists of students-like a support group where recent graduates can talk to incoming freshmen, answer questions and help to dispel pre-conceived notions—even prior to enrollment (peer support). You could send them to talk to Dr. A. Lots of African American males who have learning disabilities, but were not diagnosed so they do not avail themselves of the services they need to be successful. Having resources available to you: labs open late; tutors in those labs—tutors who are passionate to do the work; keep effective tutors in place; and having notification of services. Maybe African American males should get a certain package of ways you won't fail including: the learning assistance center, tutoring, Dr. A., or even having the results of conversations with African American males when asked what made them successful (program resource).

Table 8 represents a summary of participant responses to the focus group query regarding what community colleges can do to help African American males be more successful academically.

Table 8. Summary of Participant Recommendations

Focus Group	Summary of Responses
Gil Scott Heron	Ask for nationality instead of race on the application, Don't diminish the value of community college
Miles Davis	Program resource and monetary support
Count Basie	Program resource culture of success and mindset
Charlie Bird Parker	Mindset, study groups, role models, desire
Herbie Hancock	Program resource, mindset, peer support

Provocative Propositions

Participants were instructed to construct a provocative proposition (an affirmative statement) that describes the idealized future as if it were already happening. When asked to construct a provocative proposition, the participants provided responses which indicated that they were confident in their capacity to initiate and sustain actions to reach the goal as well as their capacity to generate routes to reach their goals. These capacities, respectively, referred to as agency and pathways are the components of hope (Snyder, 2000), therefore hope is the theme which emerged from the provocative propositions constructed by the participants in this study.

Count Basie Community College

Participants in the Count Basie Community College focus group gave responses which ranged from overcoming obstacles to utilizing resources.

Examples of provocative propositions are listed below:

RAKIM (58), had this to say:

I am successful because I am refocused and reconditioned.

KINNARD (46), echoed self-responsibility and agency:

I am successful because I removed self-imposed barriers.

OLIVER (40), articulated his approach to transforming his mindset:

I am successful because I turned a negative into a positive...because I stopped expecting negative...because I stopped being self-critical.

MISTER (48), compared a destructive past with a promising future:

I am successful because I am still able to succeed on a college level after living a negative lifestyle.

KEITH (42), shared that he set clear, reachable goals:

I am successful because I set goals that are measurable, realistic and achievable.

GREG (30), expressed success simply as:

I am successful because I know who I am.

MIKE (44), had this to say:

I am successful because I utilize all available resources.

Gil Scott Heron Community College

Participants in the Gil Scott Heron Community College focus group gave responses that ranged from going to school to achieving the goal of being a med student. Selected responses are listed below:

KALIF (23), articulated his clear aspirations:

My dream is to open up my own music store. I am successful because I'm in school, and I'm learning how to read music right now. I know it's going to happen.

EDDIE (22), had this to say about his experience:

I am successful because I'm going to school.

BOBBY (23), shares a long-term goal:

I am successful because I'm earning my doctorate [eventually].

DON (22), articulated another goal that defies expectations for Black males:

I am successful because with persistence and determination I've become a franchise owner.

BLAIR (22), had this to say about how he measures success:

I am successful because with loyalty and commitment, I developed and recently got much stronger, and I am a Med-Student.

Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College

At the Charlie "Bird" Parker Community College focus group, participant responses ranged from future success being anchored in faith, to being based in a commitment to study by any means necessary. Selected participant responses are listed below:

DANNY (48), concluded that determination is a key ingredient to success:

I am successful because I study by any means necessary.

TALIB (19), shared this about his career goals:

I am successful because I am the top Judge in this city.

LARRY (42), expressed passion and commitment:

I am successful because I have the vision, I have the fortitude, and I have the drive to work towards my goal and not fall short, no matter how long it takes.

KODY (30), echoed a familiar theme, success surrenders to persistence:

I am successful because I have faith, all trust in the lord, and perseverance. I just constantly keep going. I've learned to be content, whether I have a belly full or a belly empty, I'm still going to continue, and I still have to continue on.

Miles Davis Community College

Participants in the Miles Davis Community College focus group indicated that their future success included the accomplishment of both long and short range goals and included turning negative situations into positive ones. Selected participant responses are listed below:

MUSTAFA (18), had this to say about how he measures success:

I am successful because I went through college, I was 3.0s and up, I got my AA degree in business and at the same time I became a professional actor with his own TV show.

NEAL (18), shared clear goals:

I am successful because I took college seriously, transferred to a four year university, graduated into national business, and moved on to become an entrepreneur.

JAMAL (18), laid out his career path:

I'm successful because I turned a lot of my negative situations into

a positive situation by attending college, transferred to Howard University, and completed my double major in psychology and political science. I became an entrepreneur.

Herbie Hancock Community College

Participants in the Herbie Hancock Community College focus group gave responses that ranged from giving 100% to knocking down all the obstacles and barriers in the path. Selected responses are listed below:

WARREN (30), articulated his panoramic view of success:

I am successful when I utilize all of the resources that are made available to me which includes me giving 100 percent; being prepared; and building upon past victories.

SAMUEL (23), shared his barometer for measuring success:

I am successful when I knock down all of the obstacles and barriers in my path. When I conquer them, at that point I would realize that I was successful and will be successful in the future.

FRANKLIN (18), had this to say:

I am successful because I know what it is like to be without an education

EDDIE (18), shared his modest expectations:

I am successful because I made it to college.

Table 9 represents a summary of participant responses to the focus group query where participants were asked to describe the idealized future.

Table 9.

Summary of Provocative Propositions

Focus Group	Summary of Responses
Gil Scott Heron CC	Going to school
Miles Davis CC	Turned negative into a positive
Count Basie CC	Overcoming obstacles
Charlie Bird Parker	By faith or any means necessary
Herbie Hancock	Knocking down obstacles

Summary

The results presented above indicate clearly what some successful African American males in community college perceive as being important to their academic success. Ten themes emerged that were significant to the success of African American males in community college: Prove Them Wrong; Achievement; Advisor/Mentor; My Brother's Keeper; I Am Somebody; Post-Race; Handle My Business; Culture of Success; Program Resource; Hope.

When applying AI to qualitative research Reed (2007) recommended analyzing data across and within settings to identify setting-specific learning and learning that can be generalized across multiple settings. Growing out of such analysis is what Creswell (2007) refers to as the essence, or a composite. The composites that formed during the analysis of the data are represented by the following themes grew out of the study: Post Race Consciousness; My Brother's Keeper; I Am Somebody; Culture of Success; Program Resource; Hope. An

expanded discussion of these composites is available in chapter five. The participants' perspectives shed new light onto the dialogue regarding the concept of African American male academic success in community college. A more detailed summary and discussion of study results as well as implications and recommendations for future study will follow in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents an overview of the study, conclusion implications, and recommendations for future research. The overview of the study is a brief restatement of the problem, the research questions, the purpose, literature review, methodology and results. The overall objective of the study was to identify the factors that African American male community college students perceived as important to their academic success. Implications for developing effective programmatic interventions and institutional approaches that encourage and promote African American male academic success in community college are discussed. Additionally, recommendations for future research are addressed.

Overview of the Study

The problem addressed by this study was that of the achievement gap that disproportionately impacts African American male students. The purpose of this Appreciative Inquiry was to examine the perspectives and experiences of academically successful African American males in community colleges from a success perspective. The goal was to understand what the students themselves thought were the most important factors that contributed to their academic success. The students shared their viewpoints and opinions about what they believed to be most critical to their academic success and how other students might overcome obstacles to experience academic success. The researcher constructed a four factor theoretical frame that consisted of elements from Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory, Critical Pedagogy and Appreciative Inquiry.

These components, when combined, may emerge as a new way of lifting voices from a disconnected population.

Summary of Findings and Major Conclusions

All four factors of the theoretical framework were necessary to fully understand, explain, and respond to the experience of African American males in the American Community College. None of the theories taken by themselves could fully address the issue. Each of the factors plays a necessary and complimentary role in the conversation. Appreciative Inquiry, which suggests that the future is created and does not just happen, has been criticized for being so future focused that it glosses over the past (P. Harris, personal communication, March 15, 2008). In the framework of the current study, the future focus of AI balances, and is balanced by Critical Race Theory (CRT), which is anchored in the past. The fundamental interest of CRT is in providing counternarratives to address the lasting impact of laws and practices of the past (many of which have been outlawed, but continue to have a lasting impact today).

Additionally, Critical Theory laid the groundwork for the entire study by creating a space in the present moment to question the current assumptions about the reality of the African American male experience in the community college. Critical Theory is oriented to the present. Finally, Critical Pedagogy linked the present to the future by ensuring that as the participants in the study envision a powerful future through the provocative propositions they developed in

the Destiny Stage of AI, they move to that future with a fully developed sense of agency so that they may in fact be powerful in that future.

Emergent Themes

Analysis of the data collected from participants during this study provided insight into what some successful African American males in community college perceive as being important to their academic success. During the analysis of the data, twenty-five categories of information were identified. This was a reasonable number of categories for a dataset this size as Creswell (2007) recommends using not more than 25-30 categories to guide the development of themes. The categories identified included: Achievement (Awards, Grades/GPA, completion); Advisor connection; Faculty mentor; Alumni/Peer mentor; Handle my business; Persistence/Perseverance; Accomplishing goals; Racism; Post racism; Prove “them” wrong; I am somebody; Drug use; Turn a negative into a positive; Role model for young men/for my kids; Fashion show; Girls as a deterrent; Good grades; Personal contact with an Advisor; Early peer support; Outreach; Commitment to studying; Use this opportunity; They have to want it; Connection to group of men beyond just me; Proud to be in that number.

Further review of the data resulted in the emergence of ten themes that were relevant to the success of African American males in community college (Prove Them Wrong; Achievement; Advisor/Mentor; My Brother’s Keeper; I Am Somebody; Post-Race; Handle My Business; Culture of Success; Program Resource). The five composites that were formed from comparing those themes across the different contexts of the focus groups contributed to the development

of the major conclusions for this study. The researcher will discuss below the major conclusions of this study in relation to the original research questions.

African American Male Experiences in Community College

During the Discovery Stage of this Appreciative Inquiry, the critical theory component of the theoretical frame was applied. Reduced to its simplest form, critical theory empowers individuals to question the prevailing assumptions about reality. In the context of the current study, critical theory was operationalized as the ability of African American male community college students to question the prevailing assumptions about their experience in the community college.

In response to the first research question: How do African American males describe their experiences in the community college, Critical Theory was applied to engage participants in questioning the prevailing assumptions about their experiences in the community college. When discussing their experiences in community college, several participants provided responses that were categorized under the theme Post Race Consciousness which indicated that participants either denied the significance of racism in their college experience or were unaware of the impact of racism in their lives. This response was reflected in three of the five focus groups. Closer examination revealed that these respondents were younger (between 18 and 25) and attended colleges on suburban or rural campuses. In contrast, the participants giving the I Am Somebody response, tended, for the most part, to be on urban campuses and represented a broader range of ages (18-58). Table 10 presents an overview of the response summaries by focus group.

Factors that Contribute to African American Male Success

Critical Race Theory was operationalized during the current study in the combined Dream/Design middle stages of this Appreciative Inquiry by applying the second research question: How do African American males describe the factors that contribute to their success. The participants were afforded the opportunity to be the architects of counternarratives regarding their success. In response to the focus group questions regarding success, participants created counternarratives that began with a definition of success that was somewhat different from that of the colleges they attended. While some participants defined success in the traditional fashion—goal attainment—others defined success as simply making it to college in the first place and continuing to show up on a daily basis, even going as far as to say that some of the failures were included as part of the overall experience of success.

Additionally, participant responses indicated that a factor which contributed to African American males success was reflected by the theme, My Brother's Keeper, which indicates a concern for, and motivation based on connection to the participants brothers-biological and otherwise. The theme that is represented by My Brother's Keeper represents being conscientious about a feeling of connectedness to your community that not only includes someone in the past who sacrificed in order for the participants to have this opportunity, to their peers in the college and around the globe who face the same obstacles that the participants currently face, but also a connection to their children and the children of others who depend on the participants to set the example.

This concept resonates with Freire's (1970) concept of realization. At realization, which is the fifth and highest level of critical consciousness, the perspective of the individual shifts to one of self-in-relation rather than self-in-opposition. This connection to community and concern for the wellbeing of others is also consistent with the Zulu notion of ubuntu which literally translates to read: I am what I am because of who we all are. Expressed as an ideal, ubuntu promotes cooperation between individuals (Planet Ubuntu, 2008). It is perhaps best expressed by the following participant:

I'm proud to be an African American male in college across the world, because I can honestly say coming from Newark, New Jersey, I honestly think I am the only one of pretty much thirty friends growing up who has a high school diploma and is still in school. I guess I could be proud of everybody that comes from that same community across Oklahoma, and California, etc. Eddie (22)

The participants that gave this response were principally on urban campuses, tended to be older (30 and above), and returning to school later in life. Participants expressed wishes to give back to others in the community what the community had given to them. Participants were not concerned with a reciprocated giving, but more of an exchange in a way which includes deposits and withdrawals that are done with anonymity and without expectation of a dividend from the investment as is done in a favor bank (Coelho, 2006).

The I Am Somebody theme also resonates with Critical Race Theory. It is tied to the participants' desire to be seen and recognized as an individual and a

request to not be stereotyped. The theme represented as I Am Somebody, is more than a mere reflection of positive self-regard. It is the embodiment of affirmative action-literally speaking-it is the action of affirming one's self. It is, in essence, the science and substance of claiming authorship of your own counter-narrative.

Additionally, the I Am Somebody theme is tied to the second research question because through counternarratives, participants create an empowered future. As a composite, I Am Somebody is in direct response to the notion that "to be unnamed is to be unknown, to have no identity" (Bosmajian, 1993, p. 357). When the participant asserted that "you can't tell me that after I came from nothing, went through all that I went through, and am now going to college, that I am still nothing" (Eddie), he was expressing more than a reflection of positive self-regard. His declaration was the embodiment of affirmative action-literally speaking-it was the action of affirming self. The sentiment reflected by this composite transcended the boundaries of place and program and was evidenced by the participants in the study across the board, regardless of age or location. This composite is, in essence, the science and substance of the participants' claiming authorship of their own counter-narrative, which is the very foundation of Critical Race Theory.

Conditions that Promote African American Male Success

Finally, during the Destiny Stage of this Appreciative Inquiry, the Critical Pedagogy component of the theoretical frame was operationalized through the third research question: How do African American males articulate the ideal

conditions that promote their success. This question is addressed at the final stage of Appreciative Inquiry and builds upon the belief that within the participants is the capacity for success (agency) and by helping participants to make the connection with their past experiences of success, the strengths they brought to bare, and the resources that were helpful, the researcher has assisted the participants in creating clear connections to their future success. Participants were able to look beyond the limits of the present situation and envision an empowered future where they are able to set goals and have the capacity to achieve them.

As a theme, Program Resource emerged as a primary mechanism that the participants in this study felt promoted their success. The program resource theme reflected participant interest in having programs in place that were supportive to their needs. This theme underscores the value participants placed on programmatic activities such as a book club, pre-college outreach, administrative supports, and other campus sponsored activities. The following quote by a focus group participant indicates the value participants placed on programmatic activities, and it is a good example of the vision that the participants can offer to institutional program development:

Somebody could start some type of outreach group that consists of students—like a support group where recent graduates can talk to incoming freshmen, answer questions and help to dispel pre-conceived notions—even prior to enrollment. You could send them to talk to Dr. A. Lots of African American males who have learning disabilities, but were

not diagnosed so they do not avail themselves of the services they need to be successful. Having resources available to you: labs open late; tutors in those labs—tutors who are passionate to do the work; keep effective tutors in place; and having notification of services. Maybe African American males should get a certain package of ways you won't fail including: the learning assistance center, tutoring, Dr. A., or even having the results of conversations with African American males when asked what made them successful (Warren).

Additionally, in response to the third research question the Advisor/Mentor theme emerged. Participant responses indicated the value that these African American males placed on the social support and guidance from a personal connection to an advisor or mentor. This theme reflects a desire to know someone and to have them know you, to know your name and to be invested in your welfare and willing to facilitate your access to the processes and procedures that you need as a student. This theme revealed the value of social support and guidance from campus-based significant others and indicated the importance of strong relationships with faculty and staff who have the knowledge of the nuances and ability to successfully navigate the system in such a way as to avoid unnecessary pitfalls

Finally, a word on hope. Participants articulated provocative propositions with clarity and an ability to identify and achieve goals (their future), as well as specific steps that they would take bring this future into reality. Hope theory and its component notions of agency and pathways are relevant in a conversation

about African American male achievement in the community college. Snyder's (2000) theory of hope includes both agency, which is said to be the belief in one's capacity to initiate and sustain actions to reach the goal, and pathways which are the belief in one's capacity to generate routes to reach goals. As the participants were regularly able to not only identify goals, but the mechanism through which they would achieve those goals, it was clear that these African American males did not feel disempowered. They knew who they were, what they needed, where they were going, what they had to do to get there, who could help them, and what the program that would best benefit them should look like. There was no single quote or sound-bite that captured the essence of this composite, rather this composite would seem to have captured the essence of the study. It is the refinement of the entire study.

Recommendations and Implications

Implications for Students

The implications that grow out of this study are manifold. Considering that this study was designed to lift the voices of African American male community college students, then it seems only fitting that the program recommendation that was directly derived from the student's recommendations gets listed first:

Somebody could start some type of outreach group that consists of Students—like a support group where recent graduates can talk to Incoming freshmen, answer questions and help to dispel pre-conceived notions— even prior to enrollment. You could send them to talk to Dr. A.

Lots of African American males who have learning disabilities, but were not diagnosed so they do not avail themselves of the services they need to be successful. Having resources available to you: labs open late; tutors in those labs (tutors who are passionate to do the work); keep effective tutors in place; and having notification of services. Maybe African American males should get a certain package of ways you won't fail including: the learning assistance center, tutoring, Dr. A., or even having the results of conversations with African American males when asked what made them successful (Warren).

By encouraging students to develop peer groups for academic support, community colleges can significantly improve achievement for African American male students. Utilizing learning communities and implementing cohort learning models that link students together for collaborative rather than competitive purposes can have positive results. By learning the importance of study groups and collaborative learning experiences, students can begin college with early experiences of personal success as well as success through association, thereby building a culture of success. Students can then use the early success as a reference point to build on as they go forward. A culture of success program is one that utilizes a cohort model and places students into learning communities which concentrates students around their successful peers, increasing the likelihood for success for everyone. Examples of some existing programs that have similar components include the African American Book Club, Call Me MISTER and SAAB.

African American males can establish meaningful connections to the community college by engaging in student leadership activities including, but not limited to: fraternities; student government; student representatives to campus institutional governing boards; and as resident advisors or peer advisors. African American males may begin the involvement in campus leadership activities by connecting to organizations that are specifically for African American students and then later branch out to the campus community at large.

Implications for Community Colleges

As indicated throughout this study, an engaged and concerned advisor or mentor is a valuable asset that helps to ensure the success of African American male community college students. An appropriate institutional response would be to intentionally connect students with an advisor or mentor and structure early opportunities for the two to build a relationship. Particularly useful would be to connect the student with faculty in their subject major. Although not in the student's subject major, the first year experience program at Gil Scott Heron Community College provides ample opportunities for students to connect with either a mentor or advisor and the value of that connection was evident through the student comments about the value of having an advisor assist them in navigating the system and getting things done on campus

Faculty development is another area where improvements to the campus environment can be made. This may best be facilitated through creating a safe environment where both faculty and student alike can engage in a open and frank dialogue about the impact of race, racism, prejudice and fear. Moving

towards a campus that has a healthy environment for all learners to learn can begin by breaking the silence and beginning to have courageous conversations about race (Singleton & Linton, 2006). This can occur on a monthly or even weekly basis through a brown-bag session or through informal roundtables, but it must have the genuine support of institutional leadership if it is to be successful.

Additionally, by forming partnerships with the student affairs professionals, the academic affairs branch of the college will strengthen its ability to meet the needs of African American male students. Because of their emphasis on the whole student, student affairs professionals can assist faculty to best relate to the African American male student and the range of issues that impact him, especially environmental influences.

In the instances where the college is particularly motivated to improve communication, the leadership might opt to engage in a fully transparent process. This practice can certainly be applied across the board, not necessarily limited to issues concerning African American males, or even race. A progressive college leadership can conduct an annual Appreciative Inquiry summit where the entire college community can explore its past successes and turn these into the building blocks for future success. The summit can be used encouraging and promoting African American academic success needs wide dissemination and must be used as a base for a campus planning and evaluative activities with regard to student academic success (Osiris, 2005).

In the interest of fully transparent processes, colleges can share the results of studies such as this one in forums like the Appreciative Inquiry summit

or some other venue and then begin a dialogue on their campus about conditions and how to multiply moments of success for their African American male students. Moving a campus in the direction of increased success is much more likely to come by systematically and intentionally celebrating success and seeking to replicate it, rather than by focusing on the failures and stigmatizing those who are struggling to be successful.

This study also has implications for the teaching of African American males. Some African American males arrive at the present with a fully developed understanding of the past and its impact on their present condition. They simply need Critical Pedagogy to carry them forward. Others, such as those that made up the Post Race Consciousness composite, have been so isolated by time, place and circumstance, that they lack grounding in the history of the African American experience and do not understand the impact of racism on their everyday lives. A different approach would be required to address the cultural deficits of this group of African American males. It would be necessary to begin their moving forward by anchoring their present reality in the past by first applying Critical Race Theory to their educational process and then using Critical Pedagogy to carry them forward (see figure 3). This process of moving forward by facing backwards is symbolized by the Sankofa bird. “Sankofa teaches us that we ought to reclaim our past and utilize it as an instrument to teach us, so that we can achieve our full potential as we move forward in life” (Mosby et al., 2006).

Lynch (2006) used critical race theory to examine new meanings and understandings of the purpose and role of education in a democratic society. Lynch recommended that critical race theory and its social and cultural implications be applied to education foundation courses within teacher training programs so that the teachers can be taught in a manner consistent with the needs of populations whose voices have been traditionally silenced. The modification of foundation teaching curriculum in teacher preparation programs at community colleges should make culturally mediated pedagogy a mandatory three course rotation for all students and include explicit conversations about Pygmalion effects, stereotype threat and the role teacher expectations play in influencing student outcomes. The reading list should include Delpit (2006), Hale (2001), and Ferguson (2001), among others, but particular emphasis must be placed on the transformation of the classroom practice as is addressed by McPhail and McPhail (1999) as well as the full spectrum of the needs of the African American males as is discussed by Winbush (2001).

Community colleges can make significant strides to advance the cause for the quality of the academic experience for African American males by adopting a school system. By adopting one elementary, middle, and high school in their local area, the community college can engage in creative outsourcing of interns, career fairs, early childhood education, tutoring, mentoring, and coaching, not to mention the obvious recruitment benefits to the college. These activities can both strengthen the relationship between the college and the local schools as well as provide tangible connections for all of the students.

The role of the voices of African American males as an avenue to access the information on creating a culture of success for this same population has been grossly overlooked by community colleges as a model to emulate. Additional research is needed to examine this problem at the American community college. However, for the immediate future, the strong leadership of community college presidents, the support and advocacy of community college trustees and the active involvement of faculty may be used to affect meaningful changes. The board of trustees should more aggressively help community college leaders confront controversial issues, support them in their efforts and implement policies affecting the success of African American males in community colleges.

Recommendations for Future Research

The participants in this study indicated that the Steps to College Summer Bridge Program, African American Book Club, Freshman Experience, Veterans Group, and Student Government, as well as the relationship with a supportive mentor or advisor all played a meaningful role in their success. Future research should include specific focus on the students' experience of which aspects of the above programs were most helpful. Future research with this population might include studies that are conducted to specifically identify if there are variances in responses by age, location, or socio-economic status. Additionally, this study can be replicated for African American women, Latino males, and Native American males. Additionally, future research can inform community college faculty and administrators about the unique experiences African American males

have at the community college. Additionally, future research should promote the development of policy and program initiatives that help to create an engaging and supportive environment for African American males as well as all other students.

Researcher Reflections

In retrospect, all four factors of the theoretical framework were necessary to fully understand, explain, and respond to the experience of African American males in the Community College. None of the theories by itself could fully address the issue. Each of the factors plays a necessary and complimentary role in the conversation. Appreciative Inquiry, which understands that the future is created and does not just happen, has been criticized for being so future focused that it glosses over the past (P. Harris, personal communication, March 15, 2008). In this framework, the future focus of AI balances, and is balanced by Critical Race Theory, which is anchored in the past. The fundamental component that CRT provides to this study are its counternarratives which address the lasting impact of laws and practices of the past (many of which have been outlawed, but continue to have a lasting impact today).

Further, Critical Theory laid the groundwork for the entire conversation by creating a space in the moment to question the current assumptions about reality that is therefore is oriented to the present. Finally, Critical Pedagogy linked the present to the future by ensuring that as the participants in the study envisioned a powerful future through the provocative propositions, they developed in the

Destiny Stage of AI, they move to that future with a fully developed sense of agency so that they may in fact be powerful in that future.

As a research methodology, Appreciative Inquiry shares some characteristics with phenomenology and it is recommended that at the beginning of data analysis that the researcher engage in epoche (Creswell, 2007). The process for epoche is similar to clarifying researcher bias, where the researcher has to examine the researcher's experience with the issue being studied. Although this researcher clarified researcher bias earlier in the study, it was indeed useful to engage in epoche during the data analysis stage of the current study as it assisted the researcher to more objectively examine the findings. In fact, it was only through engaging in epoche that this researcher was able to identify the inherent generational bias between the perspective of the researcher and that of the participants.

The responses by several participants were so unexpected and so consistent that it required the researcher to temporarily suspend disbelief in order to complete the focus group interview. The following excerpt best captures the sentiment "I wouldn't necessarily call it racism. More like stereotypes. I don't necessarily believe that racism really exists" (Don). The responses were echoed in two other focus groups. Further examination revealed that the twelve participants giving the response had some things in common: they were all either on a suburban or a rural college campus, and with the exception of one participant who was thirty, all others were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five.

The responses prompted the researcher to wonder whether the African American males included in this study had such ideological control exerted over their deepest desires and feelings that they were “quite literally unaware of their exploitation, frustration and unhappiness” (Macey, 2000, p. 75). On the other hand, if they had a solidly ingrained sense of agency and knew simply that their destiny was firmly within their grasp, they were able to transcend race and then define this as the “post race” period for African Americans males in higher education. The researcher wondered if their denial of their experience of racism meant that they had not experienced any or were simply unaware of what it was that they had experienced.

Additionally, it was through the writing of the research report that additional insights were revealed to this researcher about the participants in the study. Writing evolved from merely being a passive tool utilized by the researcher to record evidence during the course of the study into methods of data collection and data analysis. These data may have escaped entirely if the researcher had not *written*; as they were collected only *in the writing* (St. Pierre, 2005).

Thought also “happened in the writing” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.972) and as a result of the thought that happened in the writing, the perspective of the researcher changed and the observer became the subject of observation. The researcher’s age and orientation came to the fore of the researcher’s attention and prompted some reflection which changed how the researcher looked at self, the findings of the research, and the implications of those findings. Being a child

of the sixties and growing up Black and male in America during periods that included some portions of the Civil Rights Movement, Affirmative Action, and the Black Power Movement has shaped the researcher's perspective of the African American male experience in education. These experiences have resulted in the researcher embracing a perspective that understands race and racism to be factors that influence educational outcomes. By increasing awareness of the researcher bias, the researcher was then able to decide to revisit peer review and member checking as the means by which the interpretation of the responses could remain objective.

As the researcher attempted to identify composites by examining the experience of African American males in the community college in relation to the context of five colleges that were bound by time, place and circumstance, new and enhanced meanings emerged. The notion of context itself shifted for the researcher. Haj-Broussard (2003), presented one way of looking at context by discussing "fixity" as the rigid frames that limit the teachers in their perception of the student and how this forms a border between the teacher and the student. This definition of context applied in the current study. Yet, Ladson-Billings (1994) found that successful teachers of African American students reduced the fixed distance or "space" between the teacher and the student. The Ladson-Billings use of space to discuss context also applied in the current study. Both the use of the concept of space and border were consistent with how Mosley (2006) said that one's place was learned as a child when he "crossed the invisible border between where Black people were allowed to be and where they shouldn't be.

There was no place where Black people should be—only the distance between what was allowable and what was forbidden” (p. 25). As is even illustrated in the title of Mosley’s (2006) work, *Life Out of Context*, context represents a concept of place that goes beyond a physical location to include time and psychological space. Bachelard (1994) claimed that place was so relative that “we do not change place, we change our nature” (p. 206). It is the combinations of these four conversations about space, place, and context that correspond with how the participants in the study responded differently by place, but also perhaps how the place itself changed the nature of the participants.

Reflecting on space, place, and borders in an Appreciative Inquiry into African American male success vis-à-vis the achievement gap caused new meanings again to emerge. This time the meaning was related to the achievement gap itself. The achievement gap in question is much larger than the gap in achievement between African American male students and their White counterparts. It is the space between African American male students’ actual achievement and their unfulfilled potential. After all is said and done, it is simply the distance between personal impotence and hope.

AI calls us to not consider any piece of the puzzle broken or to blame, but urges all pieces, including learning systems, students, families, and teachers to manifest what is required to bridge this gap so that the increased capacity born of prolonged racial oppression is revealed and given wings. The true challenge that remains then is to move beyond the rhetoric that fuels the debate about cause of

problem and cost of solution and employ strategies that effectively educate all students to their greatest potential.

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the study, conclusion, implications, and recommendations for future research. The problem addressed by this study was that of the achievement gap that disproportionately impacts African American male students. For the purposes of this report, the author focused on the achievement gap that exists at the college level. The impact of the academic achievement gap has lifelong implications, long after the student leaves school. Most worrisome is the notion of personal impotence that is likely to result and the implications for a continued pattern of failure in future generations. By catering to the deficit model, prior research into the educational experiences of African American males in higher education supports the notion that many of these young men are “trapped” in a cycle of academic failure. Perhaps Byrne (2006) put it best: what we focus on we create more of. How we go about studying something will impact what we see.

The purpose of this Appreciative Inquiry was to examine the perspectives and experiences of academically successful African American males in community college. For the purposes of this study, the researcher constructed a four factor theoretical frame. The first component for the theoretical frame comes from Critical Theory, which encourages African American males to question the prevailing assumptions about their experience in the community college. Next, Critical Race Theory enables African American males to use *counternarratives* to

create an empowered future for themselves. The third component comes from Critical Pedagogy and is the concept of human agency. The final component of the theoretical frame was the 4-D process of Appreciative Inquiry.

As the researcher attempted to identify composites by situating the phenomena in relation to the context of the colleges that were bound by time, place and circumstance, new and enhanced meanings emerged. The sense of the context itself shifted for the researcher. As the participants were regularly able to not only identify goals, but the mechanism by which they would achieve them, it was clear that these African American males did not feel disempowered. They knew who they were, what they needed, where they were going, what they had to do to get there, who could help them, and what the program that would best benefit them should look like. There was no single quote or sound-bite that captured the essence of this composite, rather this composite, best encapsulated by the notion of hope, would seem to have captured the essence of the study. It is the refinement of the entire study.

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Institutional Review Board (IRB)

December 12, 2007

Dr. Christine McPhail
 School of Education and Urban Studies
 Morgan State University

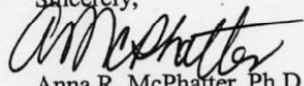
RE: IRB #07/10-0090

Dear Dr. McPhail:

Following a review of the revised materials you submitted to the IRB with respect to the research by your student, Wayne Beckles, titled "Lifting Every Value: An Appreciative Inquiry into What Works for African American Males in the Community College", I am pleased to inform you that **IRB Approval** is hereby granted for the project.

Please note that the current **approval** is for a one-year period from the date of this letter. Also note that it is your responsibility to inform the IRB promptly should there be a material change in the study methodology.

Do not hesitate to contact me at X3537, or Dr. Isuk at X3447 should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

 Anna R. McPhatter, Ph.D., LCSW
 IRB Chairperson

Cc
 Dr. Edet Isuk, IRB Administrator

IRB APPROVED SIGNATURE  DATE 12-13-07 VOID ONE YEAR FROM DATE ABOVE
--

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Appendix B

Project: Graduate Research

Project: Redefining the Dream African American Male Voices Academic Success

Researcher: Wayne Beckles

Participant Institution: Morgan State University, Baltimore, Maryland

You are invited to participate in a study that examines the experiences of African American males in the American community college system. Specifically, the study will provide an opportunity for African American male students to describe what makes them successful. The results of the study could be shared with community colleges to use to be more effective at responding to the needs of all students, and specifically, African American males. Your knowledge and participation will contribute to a better understanding of the experiences that contribute to the success of African American Males in community colleges around the nation.

Upon deciding to participate, it is requested that you sign the Participant Consent Form (by entering your first and last name and the name of your institution). Please sign and print your name in the spaces provided below to indicate that you have read this consent form and have decided to participate in this study. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw (without penalty) at any time during the focus group process. Please make a copy of this consent form for your records.

Once you have signed this consent form, you will be contacted to participate in a focus group that will be held on your college campus at a date and time, yet to be determined. The focus group will last approximately one hour and will address your experiences of success in college and the factors that contributed to that success.

Any information obtained in this investigation that can be identified with you will remain confidential. The focus group session will be video taped. The video tape will be used for transcription purposes only and the tapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. The information will be disclosed only upon your permission.

Should you have any questions concerning any aspect of this study, please feel free to contact call the Dr. Christine Johnson McPhail, the Faculty Advisor for this project at 443-885-1903 or Dr. Edet Isuk, the IRB Administrator at 443-885-3447. Thank you.

Wayne Beckles
Principal Investigator
(410) 462-8560

Signature

Date

Name Printed

Institution

Discovery–Research Question # 1:

How do African American males describe their experiences in the community college?

1. Describe your experience as an African American male community college student.
2. Describe a time when you feel you performed really well as a community college student.
3. Identify what factors contributed to your success?
4. Who has played a significant role supporting your academic success?
5. Describe a time when you were proud to be a member of the group of African American men in college. Why were you proud?
6. What do you value most about being a member of this group? Why?

Dream/Design–Research Question # 2:

How do African American males describe the components that contribute to their success in the community college?

7. How has racism played a role in your academic achievement and how have you circumvented it?
8. How have you eliminated any obstacles to your academic achievement?
9. What needs to be done in community college to help African American males be more successful academically?

Destiny–Research Question # 3:

How do African American males articulate the ideal conditions that promote their success?

10. Write an affirmative statement (a Provocative Proposition) that describes the idealized future as if it were already happening.

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