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Black male student success in U.S higher education: lessons from the Institute for Responsible Citizenship

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Abstract

The social conditions that afflict black males in the pursuit of post-secondary education are manifest. Though decades of academic literature have revealed the disproportionately low graduation statistics of black males in higher education, this subgroup still persists to degree completion at far lower rates than their white, other minority, and female counterparts (Palmer, 2010; Washington, 2013; Harper, 2013). Historically scholars have sought to determine why black male students demonstrate such low levels of achievement. This study, however, engages high achieving black men to identify how they have been successful. Specifically I employ the anti-deficit achievement framework of questioning outlined in Harper's (2012) *National Black Male College Achievement Study* to interview 16 participants in the Institute for the Responsible Citizenship's summer leadership program—a summer experience exclusively for high achieving black male collegians. Using the narratives of these students, I identify several key experiences and institutional practices that lead to black male student success in higher education.

There is a reason why Black male success in higher education has become an increasingly salient topic in education circles. Though there has been a fairly concerted effort to improve outcomes for young men of color, for nearly fifteen years, there has been little progress (Harper, 2014). Many scholars contend that while institutions have made good-faith efforts to improve outcomes for this population, their strategies have been, at best, outdated, and at worst, counterproductive (Harper, 2014; Palmer et al., 2013). Scholars such as Harper (2014) and Palmer (2010b), especially, have challenged academics to divorce the traditional deficit-based approach to discussing Black males in higher education, arguing that these historically damaging perspectives—among other things—have misinformed institutions' genuine desire to operationalize plans for improvement. Rather than defining all Black undergraduate men as troubled and lost, they contend that an anti-deficit approach, wherein researchers learn from the successes of Black males collegians, is needed in higher education (Harper, 2014; Palmer 2010b; Palmer et al., 2013). Here I seek to contextualize the current anti-deficit scholarship debate, and provide a concise review of the literature concerning Black male success in higher education.

Context of the Debate

Contrary to popular attitudes concerning Black male success in higher education, Black men have historically demonstrated high-level interest in attending college (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). And while many have argued that Black men are virtually disappearing from colleges and universities across the country, Toldson and Lewis (2012) rightly contends that the number of Black men enrolled in college is in fact proportional to the population of Black, college-aged men in the U.S. Yet, if both of these assumptions are

false, what set of circumstances inform the perspective that Black men are an endangered group in U.S higher education (Washington, 2013)? Harper (2012) aptly reasons that the basis for concern it is not a matter of matriculation, but rather an amalgamation of structural impediments to graduation. Black men unequivocally persist to degree completion at disproportionately lower rates than their white, other minority, and female counterparts (Harper, 2012; Palmer, 2010; Washington, 2013). For example, only 35.2% of Black men who began college as first-time freshmen in 2006 graduated by 2012, while, 43.1% of Black women graduated in that same timeframe. Likewise, their white male counterparts graduated at a rate nearly 25% higher—59.8% to be exact—and their white female counterparts nearly doubled their graduation rate at 64.9% (United States Department of Education, 2014a).

Six-year graduation rates of first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institutions							
Seeking Students by Cohort	*1996*	*2000*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*	*2005*	*2006*
All students	55.4	57.5	57.2	57.4	58.3	58.7	59.2
White men	54.8	57.1	57.3	58.2	58.8	59.5	59.8
Black men	32.8	35.6	34.0	33.9	34.2	33.7	35.2
White women	60.9	62.8	62.5	63.0	63.8	64.2	64.9
Black women	43.0	46.4	44.2	42.7	43.1	43.1	43.6

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), (2014b) *Fall 2001 and Spring 2007 through Spring 2013, Graduation Rates component*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

While it is important to note that Black students graduate from college at disproportionately lower rates in general, Black men graduate at especially low rates. Past literature assessing this phenomena often reinforced the harmful assumption that all Black men were so severely disadvantaged that they categorically lacked the capacity to perform well (Davis, 1994; Palmer, 2010b). This framework of analysis not only

perpetuated a deficit-based approach to understanding Black male collegians—an approach wherein researchers only ask why Black men perform poorly—it exacerbated harmful stereotypes that negatively impacted students and misinformed institutional policy-making (Allen, 1992; Harper et al., 2009; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Palmer et al., 2013). In response to this negative approach, a new type of scholarship—centered on an anti-deficit framework of responding to students—emerged. Rather than researching how poorly Black men performed in higher education environments, anti-deficit scholars began to study successful Black males to identify how—despite the odds—they succeeded in college (Harper et al., 2009; Harper, 2012; Harper 2014; Palmer et al., 2013). Additionally, scholars engaging in anti-deficit studies placed a particular emphasis on institutions, contending that colleges and universities have a responsibility to create culturally affirming and accommodating educational environments. Today, anti-deficit literature is not only highlighting myriad success stories of Black men in college, it is also providing a much needed counter narrative to the otherwise bleak—and frankly stale—storyline informed by deficit-based studies (Harper, 2012; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Palmer et al., 2013a; Harper, 2014).

Defining Anti-Deficit

As Harper (2012) rightly contends, "Black men's dismal college enrollments, disengagement, underachievement, and low rates of baccalaureate degree completion are among the most pressing and complex issues in American higher education" (Harper, 2012, p.3).Yet more worrisome than the challenges to Black male success in higher education, are the approaches educators and policymakers have taken to address these challenges. Indeed educational outcomes for Black males have remained stagnant or

worsened in recent years (United States Department of Education, 2014a). While there are myriads causes for this circumstance, Harper (2012) contends the current educational status of Black males is largely attributable to "the deficit orientation that is constantly reinforced in media, academic research journals, and educational practice". Deficit studies reiterate the failure and low performance of Black male undergraduates—such studies readily chronicle the extent to which Black men fall behind their peers—but they rarely provide insight into the experiences of successful Black collegiate males. Deficit studies focus on Black men's shortcomings, without offering nuanced explanations as to why so many Black men are low performing or assessing the large number of Black males who are, in fact, successful (Bush & Bush, 2004; Harper, 2010; Harper, 2012 Harper, 2014; Howard, 2013; Kim & Hargrove 2013; Palmer et al., 2014; Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012). Anti-deficit scholarship, however, provides a healthy critique of and departure from deficit-based approach by acknowledging that Black male success in higher education has been stymied by structural equality, and simultaneously amplifying what Harper (2010) calls the "instead-of" hypothesis. Instead of exploring how Black men fail to succeed, anti-deficit scholarship, particularly in the context of Black male collegians, "pursues insights into strategies these [successful Black male] students employ to resist the internalization of discouraging misconceptions about members of their racial groups and how they manage to respond productively to stereotypes" (Harper, 2010, p. 69). Moreover, it is important to note that anti-deficit scholarship produced by academicians such as Harper (2012) and Palmer et al. (2014) arrives at different conclusions than the deficit scholarship produced by Ogbu (1983) and the like. This is principally due to the fact that anti-deficit scholarship emphasizes *institutional* racism as

an impediment to success rather than *individual* responsibility. Simply put, anti-deficit scholarship poses different research questions, considers structural and institutional inequities, and ultimately studies a different subset of Black male collegians.

Evolution of the Literature

The burgeoning research agenda of anti-deficit scholars materialized not as an interrogation of young Black men, but rather as an investigation of the environmental forces that institutions of higher education historically failed to address when it came to the success of Black male students. In the life of academic literature, however, anti-deficit scholarship is relatively new. Walter Allen's (1992) study "serves as [an early] point of departure" from deficit-based research (Kim & Hargrove 2013, p. 3). Though his research focused on Black students in general, Allen (1992) used data from the National Study of Black College Students (NSBCS) to investigate the extent to which individual personalities, student backgrounds, and the racial composition/unity of *campus* affected student success. He specifically analyzed trends along three measures: academic achievement, social involvement, and occupational aspirations. Through extensive multivariate analysis, he found that the students in his study were most successful when they were academically prepared, motivated/ambitious, and most importantly, supported by culturally affirming institutions (Allen, 1992). Allen's (1992) findings revealed that although individual characteristics play a critical role in a student's success, institutional culture is integral to student success. Without question, institutions have a vested interest in their students' success, but Allen (1992) contended that institutions themselves— particularly predominantly white universities (PWIs)—can actually have adverse effects on student success outcomes. Allen (1992) not only refrained from disparaging the

students in his study who did not do well at PWIs—clearly diverging from deficit-based literature—he, in fact, highlighted the educational resilience of students that were successful in spite of their racialized experiences, and challenged institutions to consider how campus culture might impede students' progress (Allen, 1992).

Since Allen's landmark (1992) study, a growing number of scholars have contributed to the body of knowledge concerning Black male achievement in higher education. As Harper (2014) notes "no one officially launched a movement focused on Black men in postsecondary education. Yet suddenly, dozens of articles started appearing in journals, books were being published, and professional conferences were abuzz with conversations about this population" (p.126). The authors of a monograph recently published by the Association for the Study of Higher Education echo the sentiments of Harper (2014), maintaining that the this field of scholarly inquiry has grown exponentially, "evidenced by the increase of academic journals, conference presentations, peer-reviewed articles, and books on Black men in college" (Palmer et al., 2014, p.5). In fact, beyond voracious scholarship production, hundreds of millions of dollars were poured in to Black male achievement initiatives organized by city governments, non-profits, and foundations. Both Harper (2014) and Palmer et al. (2014) provide thoughtful coverage of the current state of the literature. Palmer et al. (2014) provide an especially exhaustive meta-synthesis of the current literature on the topic, contending that the purpose of their work "is to develop a comprehensive synthesis and analysis of literature on factors promoting the access, retention, and persistence of Black men in higher education" (Palmer et al., 2014, p.6). Much like Harper (2014), they not only "provide a comprehensive understanding of the status of the literature," they also "offer 'fresh'

suggestions on new/revised areas for future inquiry" (Palmer et al., 2014, p.6). Given the

timing and exhaustive nature of Palmer et al.'s (2014) monograph as well as Harper's

(2014) chronology of the Black male achievement agenda, this literature review will use

their treatment of the current scholarship as a guide and oft-cited resource in the pages to

follow.

Literature Review

Much of the scholarship by produced by the researchers conducting anti-deficit

studies has sought to identify the socio-historical forces that contextualize the experience

of Black male students, and the inability of institutions to respond to those forces (Palmer

et al., 2014; Harper, 2014; Kim & Hargrove 2013). Palmer et al.'s (2014) monograph

notes that anti-deficit literature has purposely situated the responsibility for student

success on the institutions that serve them—a position prior deficit-based literature did

not advance. Placing the onus on institutions to facilitate the success of Black male

students, rather than students themselves, is a hallmark of anti-deficit literature—it reifies

the analytical framework scholars use to assess the performance of Black male students

(Harper et al., 2009; Harper, 2012; Harper 2014). Stated differently, while researchers, of

course, maintain that students have agency and a degree of individual responsibility for

their collegiate experiences, they rightly contend that disparate graduation rates for Black

men cannot be squarely attributed to matters of personal responsibility (Wood & Essien-

Wood, 2012; Wood, 2011). Thus while there are structural and environment forces that

inhibit a diversity of students from succeeding in college, the overwhelming content of

the literature suggests that there is something unique about the experience of Black men,

due to historical trends of race-based discrimination and flawed cultural assumptions

about Black masculinity (Palmer et al., 2014; Harper et al., 2009; Harper, 2012; Harper 2014; Palmer et al., 2013; Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012). Historically Black men have been relegated to a social position replete with employment discrimination, formal and informal educational segregation, and race-based violence (Harper et al., 2009). The culminating effects of these instruments of institutional marginalization unequivocally contribute to the disproportionate retention and graduation rates of Black collegiate men; therefore, anti-deficit scholarship has accurately focused on institutional responsiveness, while simultaneously lauding the efforts of successful Black males (Harper et al., 2009; Harper, 2012; Harper, 2014; Palmer et al., 2014). Given these themes in the scholarship, I not only review literature examining institutional forces that adversely affect Black males from pre-K to post-secondary education, I also provide robust coverage of extant literature on Black men who have successfully navigated higher education in spite of myriad, structural impediments to their success.

Institutional Forces in PreK-12 Education

As scholars note, "[b]eginning in early childhood education, subtle stereotypical messages regarding the cognitive abilities, behaviors, and life expectations for Black males are received from teachers, peers, and the media" (Palmer et al., 2014). These messages undoubtedly socialize Black boys to believe they are not only incapable of succeeding, but are also unwelcome in classroom environments (Davis, 1994; Harper, 2006; Palmer et al. 2013). According to Palmer et al.'s (2013) study of Black male high school students, one of the many reasons Black boys do not have a sense of belonging in the classroom is the absence of "skilled and culturally component teachers" (p. 291). The young men Palmer et al. (2013) interviewed specifically indicated that they would have

been better prepared for college had they experienced more Black male teachers and/or role models in their classrooms. The perspectives of these young men—students who had already been accepted to college—corroborate what extant literature tells us about the presence of same-race, same-gender authority figures in the lives of Black students. Both Palmer et al.'s (2013) and Palmer et al.'s (2014) synthesis of the literature pertaining to Black male teachers posit that minority teachers often employ pedagogical practices that are culturally relevant and affirm the presence of students of color in their classroom. That being said, it is particularly important to note that nearly 90% of PreK-12 teachers are white, and the overwhelmingly majority of those teachers are women (Palmer et al., 2014). Beyond the absence of teachers with whom they share a common racial/ethnic identity, existing literature also reveals that most Black boys attend urban schools where many teachers are unqualified, inexperienced, and lack certification in their area of instruction (Palmer et al., 2014; Palmer et al., 2013). Thus these young men are not only educated by teachers who often engage in culturally incongruent pedagogy, they are also pupils of educators who are ill-equipped to meet their educational needs, independent of their unique social position.

Additionally Black boys are often met with alarmingly low expectations from educators. As Museus et al. (2010) contends, "[i]t has also been noted that teachers hold significantly higher expectations for Asian and White students than for their Black peers" (p.818). From primary to post-secondary education, educators expect less from Black students, especially Black men and boys. Unfortunately, the impact of these expectations render Black male students at an educational disadvantage based merely on assumptions about their performance (Allen, 1992; Harper et al., 2009; Museus et al., 2010; Harper

2014; Palmer et al., 2013). Furthermore, in the media they are often "depicted as gangsters, drug dealers, and street thugs," which enable educators to characterize "Black males as aggressive, nefarious, indolent, ignorant, and brutish" (Palmer et al., 2014, p.9). Thus, inexplicably low expectations compounded by the manner in which the media portray Black boys and men, manifest in the mechanisms schools use to address them in the classroom. Such harmful characterizations, for example, correlate with an overrepresentation of Black boys in exclusionary discipline (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). As Thomas and Stevenson (2009) adroitly observe, "racial disproportionalties in exclusionary discipline is common, with African American male students receiving punishments (e.g., suspensions and expulsions) harsher than those of their European American counterparts" (p. 163). Further research additionally contends that when these prescriptive judgments are operationalized into in-school punishments Black males are socialized towards the criminal justice system—the so-called school-to-prison pipeline (Fenning & Rose, 2007). And contrary to arguments advanced by criminologist such as Heather MacDonald, who contend that there are racial disparities in the criminal justice system because Black people simply commit more crimes (Walker et al., 2011), Black boys often face harsher consequences for offenses that are less severe than those committed by their white peers (Bryan et al., 2012; Dancy, 2014; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009; Gregory et al., 2011).

Lastly it is important to note the historically disturbing stigma of racial inferiority that has invaded the psyche of many PreK-12 educators. Black males are disproportionately represented among students classified with learning disabilities; moreover, the number of Black boys in special education programs has a positive

correlation with the number of white teachers in a school (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Palmer et al., 2013; Palmer et al., 2014). Simply put, the more white educators in a school, the more teachers are likely to consider Black boys incapable of functioning in a traditional classroom environment. This unconscionable trend is emblematic of the discriminatory views historically held concerning Black men and boys. It is taken almost as a statement of fact that Black men and boys just cannot perform as well as other students. In reference to Black male undergraduate students, Harper (2014) contends, that "'[a]nyone who takes time to read about them could confidently conclude that Black male undergraduates are troubled, their future is bleak, they all do poorly, and there is little that can be done to reverse long-standing outcomes disparities that render them among the least likely to succeed in college'" (p.117). Existing literature on Black boys in PreK-12 environments has focused extensively on the reasons why Black boys fall behind in school, but the literature provided herein, pivots the burden of facilitating success on educational institutions, as the forces that impede the success of Black boys are structural. Assuming primary and secondary institutions do not tacitly maintain that Black boys are inherently less intelligent than their peers, they must consider the environmental and social factors that render Black boys and among the lowest performing subgroups in primary and secondary education; moreover, institutions must consider the extent to which they exacerbate education inequities by failing to appropriately respond to the needs of Black male students (Fenning & Rose, 2007).

Institutional Forces in Higher Education

Similar to arguments advanced concerning Black males in PreK-12 environments, scholars maintain that it is incumbent upon institutions of higher education to explore

mechanisms for improving the material experiences of Black men navigating higher

education. In general, the environmental and social impediments to Black boys' success

in pre-college settings continue into higher education, and are only compounded by

additional challenges specific to post-secondary education. Here I provide concise

coverage of those structural forces, and then pivot the conversation to the "educational

resilience" hypothesis advanced by Kim and Hargrove (2013).

In order to better understand the challenges Black men face in the context of

higher education, it is important to identify their avenues into the sector. As Palmer et al.

(2014) note, most Black undergraduate men are situated in the public two-year,

community college setting—roughly 41% of Black men enrolled in college attend these

institutions. While some scholarly work has given consideration to the experience of

Black men enrolled at community colleges, the overwhelming majority of the research

has focused on Black undergraduate men at public or private, not-for profit, four-year

institutions (Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012).

Percentage of Men by Race Enrolled in Postsecondary Education by Sector

Institutional Sector	Public Four-Year	Private Not-For-Profit Four-Year	Public Two-Year	Private For-Profit	Others or More Than One
Total	30.4	11.7	39.2	10.8	7.9
Black	**23.1**	**10.1**	**41.0**	**18.6**	**7.3**
White	32.8	13.3	37.3	8.7	7.9
Latino	25.3	7.1	46.6	12.9	8.1
Asian	38.1	12.6	34.0	6.7	8.6
American Indian or Alaska native	26.0	6.1	36.9	21.6	9.4
Native Hawaiian/ other Pacific Islander	27.7	9.2	45.2	9.0	8.8
Other	28.8	13.9	39.9	9.9	7.5

Source: National Postsecondary Student Aid Study. (2012). *NPSAS institution sector (4 with multiple) by race/ethnicity (with multiple) for gender (male)*.Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Nevertheless the educational journeys of Black undergraduate men at community colleges are still germane to this literature review. Again, community colleges serve as Black males' main entry way into higher education, and given the abysmal retention and graduation rates in the community college sector—42% overall retention rate from fall 2011 to fall 2012—the experience of these students merit brief examination in this paper (Palmer et al., 2014; United States Department of Education, 2014c). First, the average age of Black men enrolled in community college is 28; this presents two immediate challenges for students in this category. Given their age, most Black men enrolled in community colleges are likely to be legal independents—61.7% to be exact—furthermore, 28.3% these students are actually responsible for their own legal dependents—children or persons for which they are legally responsible. Palmer et al. (2014) appropriately contend that "[t]his level of external responsibility can place great pressure on Black men as they seek to negotiate their external responsibilities with their collegiate commitments" (p.19). In addition to their age, Black men enrolled in community college are more likely to be first-generation college students as well, which again, places them at a disadvantage because they lack much of the requisite social and cultural capital necessary to succeed in college (Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012).

In the four-year college sector, Black men face a slightly different set of stressors, most of which are manifestations of poor institutional capacity to accommodate the unique needs of this population (Harper, 2014). Thus the vast majority of studies concerning Black men have examined their experiences at PWIs, explicating the impact of harmful race-based stereotypes and racial micro-aggressions incubated at these institutions. In fact many scholars contend that minority students run the risk of

encountering stereotype threat; particularly at elite or top-tier institutions where students

of color are often considered beneficiaries of non-meritocratic admissions policies.

Stereotype threat is said to occur when (1) white students believe that most of their Black

peers were admitted because academic standards were lowered in order for them to gain

admission, and (2) Black students get the sense that their white peers believe they should

not be there, and the stress of succumbing to the stereotype actually results in poor

academic performance (Fischer & Massey, 2007; Owens & Massey, 2011). In addition to

damaging perspectives held by their majority-peers, Black men are also subject to the

effects of duplicitous campus cultures. While lauded when they are—or assumed to be—

star athletes, Black men simultaneously encounter faculty at PWIs who have low

expectations for their classroom performance and overall academic success (Palmer et al.,

2014). This, in turn, leads to chilly, unsupportive relationships with white faculty

members, curricular experiences that are culturally exclusive and concomitant feelings of

alienation. Palmer et al. (2014), quoting Shaun Harper, contend that:

> '[The belongingness of Black men] is constantly threatened by the reinforcement
> of racist stereotypes that stigmatize them as unqualified admits who gained access
> to the institution through affirmative action or participation on an intercollegiate
> sports team, underprepared "at-risk" students who all emerged from low-income
> families and urban ghettos, and dangerous thugs from the local community who
> pose a security threat to the campus' (p.64).

Numerous studies have shown that threats to Black men's sense of belonging can

have adverse psychological effects on their performance (Allen, 1992; Harper et al.,

2009; Harper, 2012; Harper 2014; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012).

In many instances, Black men have reported better experiences at Historically Black

Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). These institutions are known to "offer a campus

ethos that is rich in collectivist cultural values, and maintain a cultural integrity evident in

their engagement and support programming" (Kim & Hargrove, 2013, p.4). Palmer and

Strayhorn (2008), for example, conducted a study of 11 academically underprepared men

in an educational support program provided by an HBCU. These scholars found that the

men in their study graduated in spite of their academic shortcomings, which they explain

is largely attributable to self-efficacy. The men in the study reported that the program

helped them become more responsible for their success, properly organize and

concentrate on their priorities, and develop a fondness for their academic majors (Palmer

& Strayhorn, 2008). Likewise, Fountaine and Carter (2012) found that nearly 233

academically underprepared students experienced positive gains in academic

achievement after completing an HBCU bridge program. Findings from studies like these

undoubtedly reiterate the "importance of support programming for Black men who are

underprepared entering postsecondary education" (Kim & Hargrove, 2013, p.). These

programs enabled participants from both studies to report a level of confidence

commiserate with academically prepared students at PWIs (Bridges, 2010; Harper et al.,

2009; Hebert, 2002). Additionally, Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) also maintain that while

Black men enrolled at PWIs generally demonstrate greater academic performance than

their usually underprepared counterparts at HBCUs, both groups of students demonstrate

similar levels of success (graduation), and HBCU attendees, in fact, show greater levels

of satisfaction with their collegiate experiences. There again, the literature reaffirms the

notion that institutional support is a key ingredient to success for Black males.

Black Male Student Success in Higher Education

A core tenet of anti-deficit scholarship—beyond emphasizing institutional

responsibility for student success—is a success-based approach to improving Black male

achievement. Said in another way, rather than focusing on Black men who fail to succeed in higher education, anti-deficit scholars examine Black men who have been successful in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges. Scholars glean from these students the type of educational environments necessary to improve the experiences of other Black men navigating post-secondary education. Existing research has made it relatively easy to categorize the types of experiences that are integral to Black male success. Successful Black males, who demonstrate what Kim & Hargrove (2013) call *educational resilience*—the process whereby an individual has been academically successful, despite obstacles—reiterate several common mechanisms for success. Chief among these mechanisms is student engagement; defined broadly as activities or experiences, in and outside of the classroom, that are educationally meaningful. Research from a sizable number of scholars has elucidated the positive correlation between student engagement and success outcomes. Harper (2005), for example, contends that Black men experience positive results when they are involved on campus because active engagement in out-of-classroom settings gives students the opportunity to establish substantive relationships with other students, faculty, and senior-level campus administrators. These types of connections, in addition to general campus engagement, positively affect Black men's sense of belonging on campus, which also affects their persistence towards degree completion (Strayhorn, 2012; Harper, 2012). As Strayhorn (2012) and Harper (2005) note, student organizations especially provide opportunities for Black men to development a healthy level of institutional satisfaction. Black Cultural Centers, student unions, and the like allow Black men to cultivate relationships with one another, participate in educationally purposeful work such as tutoring or studying, and conduct

student meetings that enable them to develop leadership ability (Patton, 2006). Brown (2006) also notes in his study of 25 successful Black men at PWIs that intramural athletics and campus recreation activities as well as traditional student organizations facilitate student engagement for Black men.

Beyond student organizations, relationships with faculty are also useful. These relationships help Black men develop academic skills, leadership capacity, and occupational/ educational aspirations—all of which contribute to their sense of belonging (Palmer et al., 2014). Davis (1994) and Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) do, however, contend that Black students generally have the least amount of satisfaction with their faculty relationships at PWIs. Yet while PWIs should certainly make note of this disparity, and perhaps consider adopting pedagogical techniques employed by HBCUs, the formation of substantive relationships with faculty is generally beneficial across PWIs and HBCUs (Fries-Britt &Turner 2002).

Additionally peer interaction, mentorship, and Black men's initiatives are also substantively part of the student engagement experiences that anchor students to institutions. Astin (1993) contends that, "[t]he single most powerful source on influence on the undergraduate student's academic and personal development is the peer group [...] the amount of interaction among peers has far reaching effects on nearly all areas of student learning and development" (p. 8). For Black male students, peer groups play a particularly important role because they often help to facilitate a sense of belonging at an institution that is cultural incongruent. In a similar vein, mentorship provides Black men with access to people and places that evoke a strong sense inclusiveness. Both Scott (2012) and Harper (2012) maintain that mentors give Black men access to powerful

information networks, direct them to student organizations and clubs, and act as informal guides throughout a Black male students' college career. Much like peer groups, mentors help Black men navigate the formal and informal channels necessary to be successful college students. Furthermore, Black men are often time successful when the institutional culture of their college or university affirms and encourages them to be engage campus-leaders. As Palmer et al. (2014) note, this type of culture is presently manifesting itself in the form of Black Male Initiatives (BMIs) on college and university campuses across the country. While BMIs vary from institution to institution, Palmer et al. (2014) contend that there are several common factors—welcoming and affirming approach to engaging Black men, promotion of collective or shared identity, emphasis on mentor-mentee relationships, structured opportunities for thoughtful reflection—that all initiatives share. These factors, when actualized appropriately, encourage Black men to forgo relying solely on each other, and invite them to tap into a wider campus network of support, which generally results in increased retention and persistence (Palmer et al., 2014). Beyond the aforementioned mechanisms for student engagement, there are several other smaller factors of success to include: financial support, spirituality, family support, and non-cognitive factors such as racial and masculine identity; however these several factors are tangentially related to student engagement, and others will be revisited in the findings of my study.

A report from the National Black Male College Achievement Study

Finally, to conclude my discussion of the literature, I pay special attention to a recent study conducted by Dr. Shaun Harper. Harper's (2012) study is of particular importance because it substantively informed the research design for this my study. Dr.

Harper serves as Executive Director of Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education at the University of Pennsylvania, and has arguably positioned himself as the most prominent academician producing anti-deficit scholarship on Black males in higher education. He has published extensively, and is a thought-leader in the arena of Black male achievement. His popularly cited study of Black college male achievement has breathed new life into the scholarly dialectic concerning Black male success in higher education, and will serve as the basis for his forthcoming book, *Exceeding Expectations: How Black Male Students Succeed in College*.

Harper's (2012) nationwide study involved 219 Black male collegians at 43 different institutions across the U.S. First it is important to note that the geographic and institutional diversity of the participants in an anti-deficit, qualitative study of this size separates this study from most scholarship in the field (Harper 2014). As Harper (2014) explains, qualitative studies generally have been much smaller, and often times situated on one campus. Harper (2012), however, interviewed 219 Black male students, recorded their interviews, and transcribed the audio into nearly 4,500 pages of transcript data. Harper (2012) employed an anti-deficit framework as he conducted the interviews.

Source: Harper, S. R. (2012). *Black male student success in higher education: A report from the National Black Male College Achievement Study*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education.

Consequently, rather than asking deficit-based questions such as, "[w]hy are Black male undergraduates so disengaged in campus leadership positions and out-of-class activities," Harper (2012) asked success-based questions like, "[w]hat compels Black undergraduate men to pursue leadership and engagement opportunities on their campuses" (p. 4, Table 2).

Key findings from the study were grouped into six categories—getting to college, choosing a college, paying for college, transitioning to college, student engagement, and responding to racism—with a few smaller sections cited at the end of the study. Harper's (2012) findings were not particularly novel in comparison to what other anti-deficit researchers have presented in their work. Generally Black men perform better when they have the following (Harper et al., 2009; Harper, 2009; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Palmer 2010a; Palmer 2010b, Palmer et al., 2013; Palmer et al, 2014; Wood & Wood-Essien, 2012):

1. Educational background and /or supplementary resources that help prepare them for the rigors of college.
2. Parents or mentor/figures in their immediate community who can help them acquire knowledge about college, prior to matriculation.
3. Information about and access to funding sources such as Pell grant, institutional scholarship support, work study programs, federally subsidized student loans, etc. that help them responsibly finance their education.
4. Peers or faculty/staff of color who can help them navigate informal channels of their college or university.
5. High-impact student engagement practices, both in and outside of the classroom, such as faculty-sponsored research or student-leadership experiences.
6. Degree of educational resilience that enables them to productively respond to racism (stereotype-threat and micro-aggressions) and/or an educational environment that emphasizes culturally competent pedagogy.

Nevertheless, what makes Harper's (2012) study unique—what classifies it as an improved iteration of anti-deficit scholarship—is the manner in which he conducted it.

He identified successful Black collegiate males by soliciting recommendations from their colleagues, university presidents, and student government presidents, and then he asked them what it took for them to be successful (Harper, 2012). In a fairly novel way, he tapped into an extensive network of educationally resilient Black male students, and used their common experiences to determine what type of campus climates institutions need to create in order to improve the number of Black men who not only matriculate, but graduate from college. Studies like Harper's (2012) catch nuances that reviews of survey data will not reveal, but more importantly they give voice to young men who know more about being a successful Black male collegian that almost anyone else.

Research Methodology

After an extensive review of extant literature concerning Black male college student success, I hypothesized that the following major themes would emerge from my study. I expected family support and guidance to play a significant role in the success of the students, particularly in the pre-college space. Beyond family, I expected student-engagement to emerge as a clear indicator of student success, especially in the context of student organizations as well as relationships with faculty, staff, and administrators. And lastly, I expected inclusive campus climates—those featuring communities and organizations designated for Black men, cultural centers for Black and other minority students, and formal or informal mentoring programs—to play a large role in facilitating the success of Black male collegians. I especially believed these themes would emerge from my study, given that Harper (2012) found that similar factors were essential to the success of the students in his study. Again, Harper's (2012) conclusions are particularly germane to my study, as I intentionally employed a semi-replication of his research design to conduct my own research.

Nevertheless, it is also important to note where the design of my study diverges from Harper's (2012). First my study assesses a concentrated group of hyper elite students, attending some of the most competitive public and private institutions in the country. Furthermore, students in my sample population do not merely attend elite institutions, they demonstrate exemplary academic records and have positioned themselves as well known, campus leaders. Most distinguishably, though, they all have been named Institute Scholars at the highly selective Institute for Responsible Citizenship—a Washington D.C. based summer experience, exclusively for high achieving junior and senior Black male college students. Thus unlike Harper's (2012) sample, the participants in my study were screened and accepted by a competitive external body, and consequently rendered among the nation's highest performing Black male undergraduates.

Overview: The Institute for Responsible Citizenship

> We established the Institute in 2002 to provide an intensive two-summer experience for America's best and brightest African American male college students. Several programs serve disadvantaged students, especially those with marginal academic records, but students who resist the allure of the streets, work hard and achieve academic success are typically neglected. – William A. Keyes, President, Institute for Responsible Citizenship

The Institute for Responsible Citizenship (Institute), founded with the intent of encouraging extraordinary men to do extraordinary things, selects 12 high achieving Black males in their sophomore year of college to participate in a two-summer leadership program hosted at American University. Program participants are selected from a talent pool of several hundred applicants, many of whom have been identified as leaders on their respective campuses and boast competitive GPAs. Once accepted, participants are given the opportunity to participate in high-level internships in their fields of interest, the

Lynde and Harry Bradley seminar on economic and constitutional principles, comprehensive leadership and professional development workshops, private briefings with some of the nation's most prominent public and private sector leaders, and serve as teachers and mentors in the Institute's Youth Scholar Academy. Given that the Institute selects scholars from across the country, Institute Scholars, as they are called, possess a wide variety of academic and professional interests and represent a range of institutions including: small liberal arts colleges, large public research universities, Ivy League institutions, and historically Black colleges and universities.

The program typically begins the first Sunday in June and ends on the last Saturday in July; it is a two-summer commitment. Over the course of the first summer, Scholars take courses, participate in internships, attend meetings with high-level figures, and develop close relationships with the members of their cohort. The second summer features more opportunities for professional development, character development, mentorship, and graduate school preparation, given that second-year scholars are rising seniors; however, scholars still work full-time at internships as well. Scholars have worked as full-time interns for a variety of entities including, but not limited to: the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Deloitte Consulting, the Washington Nationals, the NAACP, the Center for American Progress, Georgetown University Law Center, ABC News, and various U.S federal departments. The Institute works diligently to place scholars in paid internships; however, in the event that a scholar's internship of choice is not paid, the Institute provides a stipend to the student. The Institute also covers housing costs for scholars as well.

In order to be eligible for the Institute, applicants must have sophomore standing at an accredited college or university, and have completed at least one academic year on a college campus. While the program does not have a minimum GPA requirement, the median GPA for participants is a 3.65—applicants must demonstrate a strong appetite for academic rigor. Applicants must also demonstrate high levels of campus involvement by being active members in student organizations, athletics programs, arts programs, and community service activities, and the like. Most importantly, though, applicants must commit to two consecutive summers with the Institute, as the fundamental premise of the program is that Institute scholars become a part of a genuine network and brotherhood that will provide a life-time of support. According to the organization's president, access to that network requires adequate time—two years—to bond and grow with an applicant's cohort.

Study Limitations

There are several limitations to this study, one of which is the fact that I was a participant in the Institute at the time of this study. It is likely that my involvement in the program could have had an impact on the responses of the participants. Additionally, there is a degree of selection bias that could have influenced the responses of the participants. Given that the Institute recruits applicants that value mentorship and public service, the responses of the participants likely align with those values more than a broader sample. Also, due to this study's focus on institutional and structural forces affecting black male student success, personal motivation among applicants was not given specific attention. Though several participants cited that their personal desire to do

well in school, this study includes self-motivation in the concept of educational

resilience.

Moreover, it is also important to note that due to the scope of this project, there

are a few key differences between my and Harper's (2012) research methodology. First,

while Harper (2012) interviewed 219 Black male collegians across the country, I

conducted interviews with 16 interviewees in the Institute for the Responsible

Citizenship's summer leadership program.[1] Second, Harper's (2012) interviews were

generally much longer and supplemented with follow up interviews in many cases. Third,

while participants in Harper's (2012) study represent 43 different institutions, this study

only features 15 different institutions. Fourth, though each participants' interview was

recorded, transcribed, and coded into categories in a similar fashion as Harper's (2012),

the transcript data was significantly smaller. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, while

Harper (2012) interviewed incredibly successful Black male collegians, the participants

in this study represent a hyper elite group of Black male undergraduates—the junior class

alone includes four 2015 Harry S. Truman Scholarship Finalists. That being said, this

study, though not particularly generalizable, adds to the body of anti-deficit literature by

assessing a highly concentrated group of Black male achievers.

Question Protocol

In an effort to replicate Harper's (2012) methodological approach in the *National*

Black Male Achievement Study, data for this study was gathered by conducting in-depth

interviews with a national sample of successful Black college males. Each interview was

conducted with a question protocol informed by the anti-deficit achievement framework

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[1] All 21 participants in the program were invited to interview. 16 accepted the invitation. 3 were unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts. 2 simply declined to participate.

outlined by Harper (2012) (See Appendix A). All questions in the protocol were

fashioned based on three major areas of exploration—Pre-College Socialization and

Readiness, College Achievement, and Post-College Aspirations—with several sub

categories in each major section. As Harper (2012) notes

> [t]he framework inverts questions that are commonly asked about educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and Black male student attrition. It includes *some* questions that researchers could explore to better understand how Black undergraduate men successfully navigate their way to and through higher education and onward to rewarding post-college options (p. 5).

Given that the participants in this study are generally knowledgeable about black male

student success, questions were crafted and selected so that each participant would speak

to their individual experience, rather than drawing on what they read or witnessed

regarding other black male collegians. Additionally, given that the purpose of this

research is to learn from Black male collegians what types of experiences have made

them successful—experiences extant literature may not have addressed yet—questions

were left open-ended, thus allowing participants to offer their own perspectives about

their success.

 Data Collection Method

    Data for this study was collected through structured interviews with 16 of 21

participants in the Institute for Responsible Citizenships summer leadership program. 15

interviewees were interviewed in July at American University in Washington D.C., where

Institute Scholars live for the summer. 1 interviewee was interviewed in October over the

phone, as he was unable to participate in the original round of interviews due to schedule

conflicts. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes to an hour. In many cases

participants were asked follow-up questions after answering predetermined questions for

the purpose of gaining clarity or further insight into their academic experiences. After

participants were interviewed, I listened to approximately 15 hours of audio, transcribing

responses into the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo. After transcribing the

interviews, they were coded in NVivo. Seven total codes were used to categorize

participants' responses. Each code reflects a sub category in the question protocol

informed by Harper's (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework (See p.17). The codes

are as follows:

1. Pre-College Socialization: Familial Structures, K-12 School Forces, and Out-of-School College Prep Resources
2. College Achievement: Classroom Experiences, Out-of-Class Engagement, and Enriching Educational Experiences
3. Post-College Success: Graduate School Enrollment

Data Analysis

To conduct analysis for this study, I used a popular comprehensive qualitative

data analysis software package known as NVivo. The software is used to organize and

analyze interviews, field notes, textual sources, and other types of qualitative data

including image, audio and video files. NVivo allowed for easy coding and management

of transcript data; with the software, I was able to highlight key words from the interview

transcripts and drag and drop those words into the corresponding codes. NVivo also

allowed me to count the instances a code appeared in my entire data set as well as a

specific interview, which was helpful when checking for consistencies or inconsistencies

across responses. Once the codes were successfully applied to the transcripts, I used

NVivo's data analysis tools to generate statistical data about the frequency at which

certain codes appeared. Based on existing literature, I surmised that the codes for

Familial Factors, Out-of-Class Engagement, and Enriching Educational Experiences

would have the most robust data. This methodological process is not altogether different from Harper's (2012); however, Harper (2012) did not go into great detail concerning his method for transcribing and coding his interviews, so there are likely minute differences in our approaches.

Findings and Results

After coding the transcripts, the following three factors proved to be the most salient among the participants' responses: Familial Factors, Out-of-Class Engagement, and Classroom Experiences. Below is a breakdown of all seven sub-codes, and the number of times they appeared in the transcript data.

Code	Sub-code	Occurrence
Pre-College Socialization Factors		
	Familial Factors	101
	K-12 School Forces	70
	Out-of-School College Prep Experiences	49
College Achievement		
	Classroom Experiences	84
	Out-of-Classroom Engagement	101
	Enriching Educational	74
Post-College Aspirations		
	Graduate Enrollment	32

It is no great surprise that Familial Factors, Out-of-Class Engagement, and Classroom Experiences appeared most often in this study. Though I hypothesized that Enriching Educational Experiences would have been a greater contributor to success, over the course of the interviews, it was clear that the three factors listed above were prominent among the experiences of the participants.

Familial Factors

Familial factors, especially, were communicated with a great deal of intensity in the context of pre-college socialization. Almost all the participants expressed that at least one of their parents had graduated from college; some participants' parents had even obtained graduate or professional degrees. Given that their parent(s) had attended college, a reoccurring theme among participants' responses was that college was never posited as an option, but rather "it was always an expectation" that they would attend college as well.

In many cases interviewees noted that their parents always challenged them to do well in school, and were actively involved in their K-12 educational experiences. Specifically they mentioned that their parents attended sporting events, awards ceremonies, extracurricular competitions, and parent-teacher conferences. In general, the presence of the participants' parents in their K-12 experiences had a significant impact on their academic performance as well as their propensity to attend competitive colleges and universities. Interestingly enough, several of the participants maintained that while their parents had gone to college, they lacked contemporary knowledge about college, and as a

result were not as instrumental in the college admissions process. Additionally, two of the

participants cited that their parents had almost no impact on their education. They both

commented that they saw education as a mechanism for "getting out"; recounting that

they had grown up relatively poor. In every case, though, participants cited at least one

family member who had given them the courage to attend college, whether they were

able to give them specific knowledge about college or not. The role of family,

particularly parents, in the success of participants is consistent with Harper's (2012)

findings, and is also buttressed by existing literature on Black male success in college

(Palmer et al., 2014).

Out-of-Class Engagement

　　　Much like Familial Factors, Out-of-Class Engagement proved to be a significant

factor in the success of the participants, particularly in the context of college

achievement. When asked, "[w]hat compelled you to be an active and engaged student on

campus," all the collegians in the study cited extensive involvement in clubs and

organizations on campus. Nearly every participant noted that they had been involved in

extracurricular activities in high school, so engagement at the college level was a natural

occurrence. A few of the participants also cited the need to develop healthy and

productive friendships or encouragement from upperclassmen as motivation for getting

involved as well. Many of the participants specifically cited involvement in cultural

groups such as Black Men's Unions, Multicultural Centers or Cultural Houses, and Black

pre-professional student organizations. In fact, several of the participants were actually

presidents of student organizations; they especially noted the benefit of leadership and

professional development opportunities related to their status as student-leaders. Beyond

their university experiences, nearly every participant discussed the value and the impact

of their experience at the Institute for Responsible Citizenship. Participants in their

second year in the Institute especially commented on the deep relationships they had built

as well as the life changing effects of being surrounded by so many driven and successful

Black men.

In addition to student organizations, participants were also asked to discuss

whether or not they had developed mutually supportive relationships with lower-

performing Black males. The responses to this prompt were not particularly consistent. A

majority of the participants cited that while they definitely formed relationships with

lower performing Black male peers in college, they were unsure as to whether they could

classify them as mutually supportive. Many of the relationships came as a result of

mentoring or tutoring, so while the relationships were meaningful, they were not

particularly mutually supportive. Another challenge some participants cited was that

given the institutions they attend as well as the nature of their peer groups, many of the

Black men they knew were assumed to be high achieving. Additionally, they claimed that

it is not particularly common to discuss someone's academic performance; therefore, it

was relatively hard to gage whether or not someone was lower performing. Some

participants, though, were confidently able to say they formed mutually supportive

relationships with lower performing Black males; they attributed those relationships to

their penchant for not to build relationships around academics. Those at PWIs also

remarked that built relationships with lower performing peers in an effort to cultivate

cultural solidarity. Interestingly enough, a large majority of the participants noted that in

high school it was easy for them to form relationships with lower performing peers

because they played sports, which gave them the opportunity to engage a myriad of

students, performing at a variety of levels. None of the participants are currently student

athletes on their respective campuses, which may have some impact on the degree to

which they are exposed to students along the spectrum of academic prowess.

Nevertheless, student-engagement among the participants emerged as hallmark of their

college experiences. From student organizations to peer relationships beyond the

classroom, it is clear that active involvement on campus was a key factor for success for

all the participants.

Classroom Experiences

Lastly, another major factor of success among the participants was their

experience in the classroom. When asked, "[w]ere you ever the only Black student in a

classroom—if so, what compelled you to speak up and actively participate in

discussion?" most of the participants noted that they had been in a college course where

they either were the only Black student or the only Black male. Several of the students in

the study go to HBCUs, so they have not been the only Black student in a class in

college, but they had been in high school. Most of the participants cited their

inquisitiveness and upbringing for speaking up in classes where they were only Black

student. They noted that their parents did not raise them to feel inferior, so they never felt

as if they could not speak up in class. They also explained that in order to learn, they had

to ask questions, so rather than do poorly in a class because they were afraid to talk, they

chose to actively engage in the classroom. In addition, a few of the students mentioned

that they had grown up in predominantly white environments, and gone to predominantly

primary and secondary schools, so it was not uncomfortable for them to be the only Black

student, or one of few, in a college course.

Additionally participants discussed how they responded to stereotypes in the

classroom and in other academic settings. Participants noted that in K-12 they generally

responded to stereotypes in one of two ways, they either did not address the stereotypes at

all, or they over zealously addressed them head on. In college, however, most of the

participants noted that they learned how to turn instances where they have been

stereotyped into learning experiences for others. They also noted that they work

diligently to combat stereotypes simply by the virtue of their academic performance.

Many of the participants mentioned they felt if they did well in school, they could

demonstrate to others, white peers especially, that they were competent and deserved to

be in the same academic environment. Participants did note, however, that the stereotypes

they encountered, whether they were from students or teachers, often came in the form of

micro-aggressions; therefore, the stereotypes were not as overt or alienating as more

blatant forms of racism.

In fact, in the context of Classroom Experiences, participants revealed that for the

most part they did not encounter many instances of stereotypes, and generally had very

good classroom experiences. If anything, the robust data in this code suggests that

successful students face limited exposure to stereotypes and are equipped with a degree

of educational resilience, likely emanating from their parents, that enable them to

productively address stereotypes when they do arise as well as cope with the notion of

being one of few, or the only Black student in a classroom environment. This notion of

educational resilience is especially reinforced by Harper (2012) as well as Kim and

Hargrove (2013).

Additional Success Factors

Other codes that appeared in high quantities were Enriching Educational

Experiences (74) and K-12 School Forces (70). Enriching Educational Experiences

captures participants' engagement with faculty, staff, and administrators; study abroad

opportunities, and opportunities for faculty-guided research. All participants in the study

specifically named a faculty member(s), staff person(s), or administrator(s) with whom

they had developed meaningful a relationship(s). Visiting professors at office hours,

active engagement and high performance in class, student leadership opportunities, and

the general openness of the faculty, staff, and administrators were cited as avenues to

developing relationships. All participants mentioned benefits that emanated from

relationships with university personnel such as exposure to opportunities on campus,

mentoring, and letters of recommendation for professional and academic opportunities.

Only a few students had participated in other enriching experiences such as semester long

study abroad—though some had been out of the country for short experiential or service

learning opportunities. There were also a relatively small number of participants who had

engaged in research with a professor. Nevertheless, Enriching Educational Experiences,

particularly experiences with faculty, staff, and administrators, were salient among the

participants' college experiences.

K-12 School Forces also played a significant role in the pre-college socialization

process. Most participants were able to speak about specific teachers, guidance

counselors, or administrators who had been helpful to them. Surprisingly, though no

student recounted having a particularly bad K-12 experience, only a handful of participants offered glowing reports of their experience. Perhaps this was due to the fact that only small number of students had robust college preparatory experiences in their schools, and many students cited that they experienced instances of stereotyping and micro-aggression over the course of their K-12 experience. In general, though, participants seemed to have navigated this period in their life with relative ease, with the exception of a few participants who grew up in particularly low-income environments that placed a degree of strain on their K-12 experience.

Lastly, codes for Out-of-School College Preparatory Experiences and Graduate Enrollment appeared the least. Only a small number of students had gone through any formal college prep experiences outside of school. Those who had, mentioned that they visited college campuses, practiced completing college applications, and interacted with college students. They noted that these experiences were especially helpful in the way of exposure to college. Several participants also mentioned the role of the church in exposing them to college. Participants explained that exposure to adults who had gone to college or older students who were attending college was helpful in socializing them to think that college was an obvious next step after graduation. Much like Out-of-School College Preparatory Experiences, Graduate Enrollment appeared at a fairly low rate; however, that is likely due to the nature of the questions concerning graduate school aspirations (See Appendix A), and the obvious fact that none of the participants had graduated from their undergraduate institutions at the time of the interviews. It is important to note, however, that all participants in the study plan on attending graduate or professional school. When asked if they would pursue graduate or professional study at a

PWI, even if they had experienced racism at their predominantly white undergraduate institution, they almost all offered the same rationale. They explained that they would select a graduate school based on its financial resources, faculty, and competitiveness. Furthermore, they noted that going to an HBCU would not protect them from racism beyond campus, and reasoned that most professional environments are predominantly white, so it was to their advantage to prepare for that in their professional environments in graduate school.

The findings I present here are not particularly novel, but perhaps it is the fact that these conclusions are not entirely new that make this information valuable. Over the last twenty years or so, anti-deficit research has reiterated the importance of the aforementioned success factors. This study thus strengthens the anti-deficit approach to not only understanding Black male student success in general, but also success among hyper elite Black male students, as even these black male collegians experience the effects of institutional racism. This study, appropriately, places additional onus on higher education institutions to create campus environments that are conducive to the success of a broader group of Black male collegians. My findings shed light on the types of experiences successful Black male students enjoy; the question that remains is: how should institutions scale those experiences to reach a broader range of Black male students?

Conclusion and Institutional Recommendations

Here, based on existing literature and the experiences of the participants in my study, I offer three-items institutions can consider as they craft experiences and opportunities to support Black men on their campuses.

1. Institutions must create well-informed, well-resourced strategies for improvement

In years past, colleges and universities have haphazardly created stand-alone, piece-meal programs with no strategic plan or measurable objectives. Harper (2014) notes that "[e]fforts were being launched in stand-alone and fragmented ways; they had not emerged from substantive, collaborative conversations and planning" with university administrators or key stakeholders. In order to improve outcomes for Black male college students, institutions have to begin with thoughtful, campus-wide plans for improvement. Moreover such plans must be informed by broader, generalizable data. Over the last fifteen years, a disproportionate number of studies have been conducted among small groups of Black college men, often at a single institution. The results of these studies, though valuable, are difficult to extrapolate, and do not provide the type of data necessary to inform macro-level policy changes. If institutions want to initiate systemic change for their students, they have to work across departments and divisions to produce thoughtful action plans informed by broader, quantitative data (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Harper, 2014).

2. Institutions must create student-engagement experiences that allow students to find cultural solidarity, academic support, and guidance

Several participants cited the importance of cultural houses and centers that supported and advised groups/programs such as Black Men's Unions, Black Men's Awareness Groups, Black Male Initiatives, and Minority Student Pre-Orientation. These groups and centers provided safe spaces for participants to find solidarity among their peers, as well as meet faculty, staff, and administrators who became mentors and advisors. Students noted that access to Black professors and administrators were

especially helpful, as they felt relationships with those individuals allowed them to see themselves reflected in the university. Furthermore, in the process of planning student-engagement experiences, institutions must privilege "learning, academic achievement, student development, and improved degree attainment rates […] over social programming" (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012, p. 26). While Harper & Kuykendall (2012) maintain that there is immense value in social programming, particularly on campuses where Black men are underrepresented, they rightly contend that institutions should prioritize programs that help students, "adjust smoothly to the academic demands of college, learn how to effectively study and manage their time, resolve identity conflicts that undermine academic achievement, respond productively to racist stereotypes, and learn how to ask for help" (p. 28).

3. *Institutions must acknowledge structural racism and its effects on Black men*

While institutions must continue their efforts to help students cope with structural forces that inhibit student success, they must also take actionable steps to ameliorate the cause of those forces. Rather than merely giving students tools to navigate racist or discriminatory educational environments, institutions should place greater onus on professors, student development professionals, and campus administrators to curtail implicit racial biases and culturally insensitive pedagogical practices. Institutions cannot relegate matters of diversity and inclusion to a single office or equity officer; they must create institutional cultures that support students. As Harper and Kuykendall (2012) contend, institutions "should offer structured developmental opportunities and resources for faculty and administrators" who may not have appropriate competencies to deliver culturally competent instruction (p.28). Moreover, there must be a process of

accountability wherein the board of trustees holds senior-level administrators responsible,

who in turn, hold deans and department heads responsible, who finally hold faculty

responsible for the success of Black male collegians (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012;

Harper, 2014).

      While these are just three recommendations drawn from recent anti-deficit

literature and experiences of students in this study, operationalizing these suggestions,

and others, could certainly lead to improved outcomes for Black male undergraduates in

higher education. Extant literature and the narratives of successful Black collegians have

lit the path forward for higher education institutions. Black male student success in higher

education is, unequivocally, achievable; members of the Institute for Responsible

Citizenship are proof, the narratives of other successful Black men are out there, and

there is robust data to guide their efforts. If colleges and universities wish to boldly take

steps to improve the experience of Black male students on their campuses, all they have

to do is listen to the students who are already defying the odds.

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APPENDIX

**BLACK MALE SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: LESSONS FROM THE
INSTITUTE FOR RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP**

PRE-COLLEGE SOCIALIZATION & READINESS

Familial Factors

To what degree were/are your parents involved in your formal education?

To what degree did your parents shape your college aspirations?

K-12 School Forces

How helpful/supportive were faculty and staff in your K-12 educational experience?

How did you balance academic achievement and peer acceptance in your K-12 experience?

Out-of-School College Prep Experiences

Were there people or experiences outside of school that helped you acquire knowledge about college?

Were there people or experiences that helped prepare you for college?

COLLEGE ACHIEVEMENT

Classroom Experiences

Were you ever the only Black student in a classroom—if so, what compelled you to speak up and actively participate in discussion?

How did you productively address and respond to stereotypes you encountered in the classroom?

Out of Class Engagement

What compelled you to be an active and engaged student on campus?

What unique educational and outcomes are conferred to Black male student leaders?

Were you successfully able to foster mutually supportive relationships with lower-performing same-race male peers?

Enriching Educational Experiences

Have you studied abroad--what did you gain from the experience?

How have you cultivated meaningful, value-added relationships with faculty and administrators on campus?

If you have had a research with a professor, what did you find appealing about the experience?

POST-COLLEGE ASPIRATIONS

Graduate School

Do you plan on going to graduate or professional school?

Have you experienced racism at your predominantly white institution? If so, why would you pursue graduate or professional study at a similar institution in light of that experience?