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An Exploration of African American Male College Students' Perceptions of Factors that Contribute to Their Academic Success

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AN EXPLORATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR ACADEMIC
SUCCESS

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memories of my Grandmother, Inez Taylor and Grandfather, Jessie Taylor. You always taught me the importance of getting an education. I have always found comfort in knowing that you are both resting with Our Father in Heaven. As you look down from Heaven, I pray that this makes you both proud. Thank you for your sacrifices, your love and wisdom. Continue to rest in peace… Love you always!

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--- Hezekiah Walker, 2005

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AN EXPLORATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

YVETTE N. DAUGHERTY-BROWN

ABSTRACT

According to the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (2012), college degree attainment among African American males is only 16%, as compared to 20% for African American females, and 32% for Caucasian males. A great deal of research and emphasis has been placed on the struggles, challenges and shortcomings relative to African American male educational attainment. However, more work needs to be done to determine the factors that contribute to their academic success.

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the factors that contributed to the academic success of African American male college students that participated in the Baldwin Wallace University Scholars program (BW Scholars). For this program, cohorts of African American male students are selected during summers before ninth grade. Those scholars receive mentoring, academic enrichment and career readiness opportunities throughout their high school years in preparation for some sort of post-secondary enrollment.   The aim of the program is to give the scholars the support that they need to graduate from high school. When a scholar applies to Baldwin Wallace

for undergraduate studies and is accepted, he is given a full scholarship to the university.

Through one-on-one interviews, eight African American male scholars participated in this study. The results revealed their unique perceptions of academic success, and their attitudes, behaviors, and skills that were necessary for program completion. Despite their attendance in troubled urban high schools, the participants of this study benefitted from encouragement among family and friends, were careful in choosing friends, displayed good time management skills, and had a strong work ethic, all of which were important for their degree completion. Ultimately, the aim of this study is that the insights shared by the participants further inform university instructional programs that are designed to serve African American male college students.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Prior to my current role, I served as the principal of a school that functions to support students in grades Pre-kindergarten through eight. Located in the inner city of Cleveland, Ohio, the school had a student body of about 490 students that came mainly from the neighborhood where the school sat. The student body was roughly 44% female and 56% male and almost all African-American.

I recently had a conversation with one of my professors that really bothered me during the time that we were talking, and even more as I reflected on it. We were talking about the students at my school, and my professor asked me if I could call by name students that were high academic achievers. Several female students came to mind, for their perseverance, their leadership and their good grades, and their participation in activities inside and outside of school. That was easy. However, I knew what was coming next. As is his regular mode of operation, he always presses and questions a little deeper. He asked, "What about boys? Those were all girls that you named."

It was a struggle. I sat there at a loss. Another colleague from the school was sitting there with me, and we both had a hard time coming up with the name of some African American male students that were outstanding students and

school community leaders. I recall naming one little boy in second grade. The other two young men that came to mind were in eighth grade, yet they were not straight A students like the young ladies. They were A, B and occasional C students. I sat there saddened and bothered by this glaring disparity at *my* school. As I drove home, I thought about his question more, and still came up blank.

This year, Morehouse College celebrated its one-hundred thirty first commencement. Graduating approximately five hundred men, Morehouse is the nation's all-male, historically black, private college. I was able to watch the live simulcast of the commencement ceremony and was awestruck to see all of those young, African American men in their academic regalia, earning their Bachelor's degrees. I have seen a Morehouse graduating class in person and was proud. Seeing a Morehouse graduating class via my computer screen was just as moving, rewarding and exciting.

In contrast, I recently attended the college commencement of one of my former students. African American males were sprinkled sparingly among the graduates of the university.

So, as the principal of a school where I struggled to name any academically strong students, I had to wonder what got those Morehouse Men to commencement? What got those few African American males at the commencement that I recently attended to their graduation day?

Except for those deeply engaged in the study of the topic (Fries-Britt, 1997, 1998; Harper, 2005, 2006, 2007; Warde, 2008) there has not been an overwhelming discussion of successful African American males in college. African

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American males are often viewed as an at-risk population in education (Bailey & Moore, 2004; Davis, 2003; Jackson & Moore, 2006) and are often described with terms that have negative implications. It has been noted that,

> "Black men are portrayed..in a limited number of roles, most of them deviant, dangerous, and dysfunctional… This constant barrage of predominantly disturbing images inevitably contributes to the public's negative stereotypes of black men, particularly of those who are perceived as young, hostile and impulsive…Thus, young black males are stereotyped by the five "d's": dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed. There is no room in this picture for comprehension, caring, or compassion of the plight of these young black men" (Taylor-Gibbs, 1988, p.3).

In their report, *The Urgency of Now: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males (2012)*, The Schott Foundation for Public Education investigated the disparity in the high school graduation rate among African-American, Latino and Caucasian male students. According to Foundation President and CEO, John H. Jackson, the "data indicate nationally the gap between the Black and White male graduation rate has only decreased three percentage points in the last 10 years. At this rate of progress, with no 'large scale' systemic intervention, it would take another 50 years to close the graduation gap between Black males and their White male counterparts" (Holzman, p. 2). Nationally, the report reveals that only 52% of African American males graduate from high school in four years, while 78% of White males graduate in four years.

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In Ohio, the graduation rate for African American males was reported at 45%, with Ohio ranking 46th in the nation. The graduation rate in Cleveland for African American males, however, was reported at 28%.   In short, the lower graduation rate from high school lessens the plausibility of entrance to and matriculation through college. What can be done to destroy this graduation gap?

Despite these factors, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data indicate a slight increase in the number of African American males attending college in recent years. Between 2000 and 2010, the enrollment rate of African American males increased three percentage points, from 7.3% to 10.3% suggesting some progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Among the Black males who do make it into college, however, two-thirds drop out, leaving only one-third to continue to graduation (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

African American males are plagued with problems throughout their education that emerge early on in elementary school and carry on until the time that they reach college. However, with all of these challenges facing them, there are many African American males that experience success in college.

In his qualitative research study on African American undergraduate men, Harper (2012) provides what he deems a viable solution for facilitating their persistence and success in higher education:

To increase their educational attainment, the popular one-sided emphasis on failure and low performing Black male undergraduates must be counterbalanced with insights gathered from those who

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somehow manage to navigate their way to and through higher education, despite all the odds stacked against them—low teacher expectations, insufficient academic preparation for college level work, racist and culturally unresponsive campus environments, and the debilitating consequences of severe underrepresentation, to name a few (p. 3).

Statement of the Problem

African American boys face many difficulties in school. About half of African American young men do not complete high school in four years (Holzman, 2012), they are more likely to be identified for special education courses (Losen & Orfield, 2002), and take fewer Advanced Placement and honors courses (Noguera, 2008). Additionally, African American students are three and one-half times more likely to be suspended and expelled than their peers who are white (Office of Civil Rights, 2012).

In 2010, the incarceration rate for white men under local, state and federal jurisdiction was 678 inmates per 100,000 for white U.S. residents; for black men, it was 4,347 (United States Bureau of Justice, 2010). According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, black men were more than six times as likely as white men to be incarcerated in 2010. Poverty, violence, drug abuse, limited male role models, and crime, among other things, are realities in which many African American males grow up. They often experience many of the same conditions in

their adulthood. Some grow up in poor, single parent homes in crime-filled neighborhoods, where violence, death, and drugs are present in their community.

Although much has been written concerning unsuccessful African American male college students, the problem is that there is not a great deal of research that has focused on successful African American males that have matriculated through higher education. In other words, we do not know much about African American male college student success.

What factors differentiate the success stories from so many of the other young men in their community whose lives took a different path? What motivated these young men with success stories to not give up? What kept them from getting caught up in some of the negative situations that were so prevalent in their community? What made them want to succeed in an environment that often seems to misunderstand or dismiss the needs of African American males?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to explore the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American male college students that have participated in the Baldwin Wallace University Scholars program (BW Scholars). This study will explore the meaning of academic success for African American male college students and find out the attitudes, skills and behaviors that academically successful African American male college students possess. This study will also explore the life experiences that have affected the lives of academically successful African American male college students. Ultimately, the aim is to gain insight into these areas to determine the

implications for instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students, so that those successes can be refined and replicated.

A great deal of research and emphasis has been placed on the struggles, challenges and shortcomings relative to African American male educational attainment and success. However, more work needs to be done to discover what promotes success for this group.   The BW Scholars program aims to ensure that its participants have the academic support and enrichment, mentoring and career preparation components in place to get Scholars to their high school commencement and onto college.

Research Questions

Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, this study researched the following questions:

1. What does academic success mean to African American male college students?

2. What attitudes, skills and behaviors do academically successful African American male college students possess?

3. What life experiences have affected the lives of academically successful African American male college students?

4. What are the implications for the instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students?

Rationale of the Study

"The critical age for African American males is fifteen to thirty-three. If we can find a way to keep our males safe within this age range we have an excellent chance of saving our families and communities" (Kunjufu, 2001, p. 64). We are in a state of emergency, and there must be change for the African American male. With all of the societal issues plaguing African American males, there is a negative impact on African American families and the African American community at large.

There are many stories of African American males throughout the nation that have not become victims of their environment, or that have not become another negative statistic. There are many stories of African American males that have shown resilience, and did not give up in their educational and occupational pursuits. An enormous amount of literature is available that discusses the problems that African American males encounter. We know what the problems are! The real work begins in finding the solutions!

It is imperative to gain insight into how schools, communities, individuals and other organizations can become more effective and empowering for African American males to achieve academic success. The motivational and attitudinal factors that have helped so many African American males overcome their personal hardships and adversity must be explored so that they can be replicated. Understanding the factors to which African American males credit their academic success is a step in the direction of helping them break free from and defy negative stereotypes and imaging.

As participants in the BW Scholars program, the African American male college students participating in this study will share in the fact that they all are graduates of the same school district. A description of the school district follows.

About the Big Small City School District

The Big Small City School District (BSCSD) is the second largest school district in the state of Ohio. The District serves 38,725 students in ninety-six schools in grades Pre-kindergarten through eight. BSCSD is an open-enrollment district and 100% of the students receive free lunch. The District is approximately 69% African American, 14% Latino, 14% Caucasian and 3% Multi-racial (Schoolwires, Inc., 2014). According to the District website, "The Big Small City School District envisions 21st Century Schools of Choice where students will be challenged with a rigorous curriculum that considers the individual learning styles, program preferences and academic capabilities of each student, while utilizing the highest quality professional educators, administrators and support staff available." (Schoolwires Inc., 2014).

The Ohio Department of Education released the state report card on September 12, 2014 capturing District performance for the 2013-2014 school year. The state report card articulates how many students passed the state test at their grade level; how well students did on the test; the overall graduation rate; if students getting a year's worth of growth as measured by their assessments; and if students are succeeding regardless of race, disability, gender or socioeconomic status.

The report card reflects gains in student mathematics achievement in grades 4-8 as measured on the Ohio Achievement Assessment at each grade level. The report indicates that gains were made in tenth grade student achievement as measured on the Ohio Graduation Tests in Reading, Writing, Social Studies, and Science. The report card also indicates that the District has a 64.3% graduation rate, which is referred to as a "record high graduation rate" on the District website. The overall letter grade earned for the performance index is "D". The letter grade earned for graduation rate is an "F".

The African American male college students participating in this study will share in the fact that they all participated in the same program that has taken place in collaboration with Baldwin Wallace University. A description of Baldwin Wallace University follows.

About Baldwin Wallace University

Baldwin Wallace University is a private, Methodist, liberal arts institution located in Berea, Ohio. According to the school's website (http://www.bw.edu/quickfacts/), there are 3,969 students enrolled, including day, evening, undergraduate and graduate students. The student body is about 80% Caucasian students, 6% African American, 1% Asian, 3% Hispanic/Latino, 6% Unspecified and 4% Other. The campus is roughly 57% female and 43% male. The University boasts that "when founded in 1845, Baldwin Wallace was one of the first colleges in Ohio to admit students without regard to race or gender. That spirit of inclusiveness has flourished and evolved into a personalized approach to education: one that stresses individual growth as students learn to learn, respond

to new ideas, adapt to new situations and prepare for the certainty of change" (Baldwin Wallace University, 2013).

The BW scholars program began in 2003 as a collaboration between Baldwin-Wallace, Cleveland Scholarships Program (now known as College Now Greater Cleveland) and the Big Small City School District. Initially, it was called the Barbara Byrd-Bennett Scholars Program in honor of the school district's Chief Executive Officer at that time. The program selects a cohort of African American male students right before the start of their ninth grade year, and remains with them until they graduate.

According to the BW Scholars program website:

> As a pre-college access program, the primary purpose of the department is to ensure the Scholars' retention and graduation from high school, and ultimately their matriculation to higher education. To achieve this goal, the program has a model to equip young African-American males with the confidence, skills, and knowledge which will allow them to view education as a conduit to their future success. The participants are expected to commit to the program for four years, earn their high school diploma, and enroll in a higher education institution ranging from community college to public or private four-year institutions (Baldwin Wallace University, 2013a).

Annually, the program costs the University about $213,000 to operate for the high school Scholars. Those costs are funded through government and foundation grants. Upon graduation from high school, Baldwin-Wallace grants scholarships to the Scholars that enroll at the University. The program is on a

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four-year rotation, in that every four years, a new cohort of rising high school freshmen begin the program.

During Summer 2003, thirty-three young men began their journey in the BW Scholars program. "The hand-picked participants, all incoming ninth-graders…were considered at risk for many reasons, including poor grades, spotty attendance, scrapes with the law and tough home lives"(Bernstein, 2011). The first cohort of Scholars were the high school graduating class of 2007. Thirty-one of the thirty-three program participants earned their high school diploma, giving the program a 94% graduation rate. Six of the Scholars earned a bachelor's degree from Baldwin-Wallace and fourteen others completed an associate's degree. Two of the Scholars served in the military and eight went through a training/vocational programs and earned specialized certifications (Norris, 2014).

In 2007, under the leadership of Big Small Schools CEO, Eugene Sanders, the second cohort of Scholars was selected from a different high school in the district. The program was renamed the BW Scholars program, and the group of scholars was comprised of thirty-one young men. Of the Scholars participating in the program, thirty graduated from high school in 2011, translating into a 97% graduation rate. The remaining Scholar earned a GED. Twenty-six of the scholars are pursing some form of post-secondary education, fifteen are employed either full or part time and one is serving in the United States Navy (Baldwin Wallace University, 2013a). The third cohort of scholars was selected and began the program at the same high school in the Fall, 2011. Former BW

President, Richard Durst, stated that, "By any measure that I can see, this program is a phenomenal success and is changing lives for the better. I have no doubt it's worth every effort and resource we've invested." Also having commented on the success of the program was former Big Small City School District Schools CEO, Barbara Byrd-Bennett, stating that "It was worth every cent. And more….These young men would have been written off. They would have been another kind of statistic" without the help of the program.

The program has three major components:

- Academic Enrichment— The Scholars are provided with academic tutoring and Ohio Graduation Test preparation sessions. The tutoring takes place during the school year, and during the summer the young men take part in the Summer Academy at Baldwin Wallace University, where the curriculum focuses on academics, building leadership skills, life skills and career readiness.

- Mentoring and Leadership Development— In the *BROTHERS* Program, the Scholars are mentored by African-American male students that already attend Baldwin-Wallace. They also engage in the community through monthly community service activities, attending leadership conferences and training sessions.

- Career Preparation and Internships—There is a five-week summer internship, participation in career exploration, readings, résumé writing and interview practice (Norris, 2014).

Upon graduation from high school, if a Scholar applies and is admitted to Baldwin Wallace, they receive a full scholarship to cover the cost of their undergraduate studies. To be considered for admission to the University, students should graduate from high school having earned four units of English, three units of mathematics, social studies, science, and electives, and two units of foreign language. "Grades, strength of curriculum, and rank in class have always been the most important elements of our admission criteria." (http://www.bw.edu/undergraduate-admission/first-year/apply/) If an applicant has a minimum 3.0 grade point average, submission of ACT or SAT scores in the application process is optional.

Definitions of Terms

Academic success- Having graduated from high school, entered college and have completed at least three years of post-secondary education with an approximate 2.0 grade point average minimum.

Graduation rate- The percentage of students enrolled in the ninth grade receiving a diploma four years later.

Summary

The next chapter reviews the relevant literature on factors that contribute to the academic success of African American male college students. Additionally, two similar intervention programs in the Cleveland, Ohio area for African American male students will be investigated.

Chapter III contains the methods used in the study, the setting in which the study will be conducted, followed by descriptions of the participants, population and sample. A detailed review of data collection followed by data analysis concludes the chapter.

Chapter IV will contain a discussion of the research findings and results. Chapter V will summarize the study, makes recommendations, provides implications for practice, states conclusions and gives suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

African American Males and School

In addition to some of the familial, economic and social hardships that many African American males face, there are also the hardships that they endure in their kindergarten through twelfth grade education *and* in college. Black men often face some challenges that make it difficult for them to experience success in school. Black male youth often do not have access to or are not encouraged to participate in college preparatory curricula and activities (Polite & Davis, 1999). Polite (1999) studied 115 African American males who attended Metropolitan High School and discovered that the teachers and counselors frequently neglect to encourage African American male youth to take advantage of college preparatory opportunities, such as advanced mathematics courses. Additionally, he found that not more than 1 out of 15 was actually prepared for collegiate level work. Compounding these issues is the fact that parents of African American boys often do not possess a college education or school-related knowledge to understand their role in supporting their son *to* and *through* college (Hrabowski et al., 1998).

An increasing number of studies and reports have focused on the lack of strong presence of African American males and institutions of higher learning (Anderson, 2006; Bonner and Bailey 2006; Campbell and Fleming, 2000; Noguera, 2003). The findings of these studies and reports reveal some negative trends regarding African American male undergraduate enrollment, persistence and graduation. For example, since the 1990s the number of African American males from low and moderate income households enrolling in either predominately white or historically black colleges and universities has declined tremendously (Anderson, 2006; Noguera, 2003).

It is important to note that a great deal of emphasis will not be given here to all of the challenges and negative statistics relative to African American male college students. The primary goal of this phenomenological qualitative study is to explore the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American male college students that have participated in the Baldwin Wallace University Scholars program (BW Scholars). This study will explore the meaning of academic success for African American male college students and to find out the attitudes, skills and behaviors that academically successful African American male college students possess. This study will also explore the life experiences that have affected the lives of academically successful African American male college students. Ultimately, the aim is to gain insight into these areas to determine the implications for instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students, so that those successes can be refined and replicated. To that end, the focus will shift to their success.

Anti-Deficit Framework

Because the focus of this study is to find out the factors to which African-American male college students attribute their success, the Anti-Deficit Framework will be relied upon. Harper (2010) researched ways to attract more people of color into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields. "Instead of relying on existing theories and conceptual models to repeatedly examine deficits, researchers using this framework should deliberately attempt to discover how some students of color have managed to succeed" (Harper, 2010, p. 72). It is difficult to gain insight into success stories and means of success attainment for African American male college students if the focus remains on all of the negative statistics about them. Harper contends that those who have achieved success, who have remained in college and persisted through graduation can give information necessary to inform administrators, teachers, and policy makers in higher education.

Definition of Academic Success

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines success as "the correct or desired outcome of an attempt." The following criteria are five terminal outcome measures of student success and college quality (Cuseo, 2009). They represent the characteristics an institution of higher learning that facilitates academic success that are cited often (Cuseo, 2009).

Student Retention. Student retention and persistence are often used interchangeably. Student retention is evident when students stay at a college or

university, continue to register for courses semester after semester, and make continual progress toward finishing their degree (Cuseo, 2009).

Educational Attainment. When students persist to completion of their degree, program, or educational goal, educational attainment is the result (Cuseo, 2009).

 Academic Achievement. Academic achievement considers the amount of student learning and cognitive development that took place during the college experience (Cuseo, 2009).

Personal Development. Personal development is characterized by how much holistic development occurs among students during their college experience. The facets of holistic development include leadership, character, civic responsibility, social and emotional intelligence and diversity tolerance and appreciation (Cuseo, 2009).

Student Advancement. Student advancement is evidenced by a student's ability to proceed to and succeed at educational or vocational endeavors for which their program or degree was designed to prepare them after their matriculation through college (Cuseo, 2009).

Successful African American Male College Students

In a qualitative study, Warde (2008) found four major factors that contributed to the academic success of African American males. The researcher investigated eleven African American male graduate students that attended a largely minority school in New York City. Focus group interviews were conducted

with the study participants and the following were cited as contributors to their academic success:

- Realizing the importance of higher education
- Access to resources to enter and continue in higher education
- Resilience
- Mentoring programs

The National Black Male Achievement Study was conducted by Harper (2005, 2006, 2012) as a qualitative study of 219 African American males at 42 institutions in 20 states nationwide. This particular study was one of the largest of its kind. Each of the participants in the study had earned a minimum grade point average of 3.0 and had "lengthy records of leadership and engagement in multiple student organizations, developed meaningful relationships with campus administrators and faculty outside the classroom, participated in enriching educational experiences, and earned numerous merit-based scholarships and honors"(pg. 59). As a result of interviewing the study participants, Harper (2012) found that the students attributed their success to:

- Consistently high expectations from parents and family members. In those high expectations, college was always discussed as a non-negotiable.
- An influential teacher that took the time to encourage them and push them to do their best.
- Access to a college preparatory program
- A peer mentor

- Opportunities to build relationships with other college-educated adults that could teach them a great deal about success in college and future career path.

There are several factors that motivate African American male college students to succeed. Wood, Hilton & Hicks (2014) found that some African American male community college students saw motivational factors as tools for their success. In their interviews of twenty-eight African American male college students, students cited career goals, the desire to prove others wrong, the yearning to create a better future, and a responsibility to others as motivators of their academic success.

There are many factors that are highlighted in research that contribute to the academic success of African American male college students.

Family Support

Studies suggest that family support is a critical factor in assisting African American male college students in overcoming some of the barriers that they experience in achieving academic success. Hrabowski, Maton & Greif (1998, 2006) indicate that strong family support is generally distinguished by the expectation of high academic achievement, positive male and racial identification, strong limit setting, and modeling how to deal with challenging situations as a person of color.

Latimer (1999) suggests that a positive vision for children's success must be provided by their families. Included in that vision is the need to:

- Set realistically high expectations for performance and behavior;

- Understand that there are many options and opportunities for them as they grow; understand that people are willing to help and provide information about helpful programs;

- Teach that the history of African Americans is largely characterized by an ability to carry on and achieve;

- Understand that the sky is the limit with information and planning (p. 26).

Hrabowski (1991) developed an intervention program for African American males enrolled in science courses in elementary schools in Maryland. The goals of the program were to encourage African-American males to pursue careers in mathematics, science and engineering and monitor academic progress of these students throughout high school. Hrabowski argued that early interventions involving parental involvement were one of the missing links in the recruitment of African American males to higher education in general and specifically to degree programs in the sciences.

Involvement on Campus

Harper (2005) studied the effects of active out-of-class engagement on the experiences of thirty-two African American male student leaders at six predominantly white research universities in the Midwest—Indiana University, Michigan State University, The Ohio State University, the University of Illinois, and the University of Michigan. These "high achievers" were students that had earned a minimum 3.0 grade point average, leadership and membership in more

than one student organization, development of meaningful relationships with a campus faculty and/or administration beyond the classroom and participation in enrichment activities (i.e. study abroad or internships). All participants "recalled the positive benefits associated with membership in high school clubs and organizations and anticipated that similar outcomes would accompany active out of class engagement in college. High school memberships gave them the introductory experiences and confidence to seek more complex leadership roles as undergraduates" (p. 10).

Participants in Harper's study (2005) joined activities on campus that allowed them to take on leadership roles. In these leadership roles, the students cited skills that they gained as a result of their participation,

learning to work with people from different cultural backgrounds; effectively managing time and juggling multiple tasks simultaneously; functioning productively on teams, comfortable communicating with individuals, in small groups and with large audiences; delegating tasks to others; and successfully navigating complex political environments (p. 11).

The acquisition of these skills allowed the 'high achievers' to provide meaningful examples of leadership to prospective employers. "We know one thing for certain: Students who are actively engaged in educationally purposeful activities and experiences, both inside and outside the classroom, are more likely than are their disengaged peers to persist through graduation" (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p. 4).

Spirituality

Wood and Hinton (2012) explored the role of spirituality in the academic success of African American male community college students. The researchers defined spirituality as a "belief in a greater power (e.g., God, supernatural force, ordered universe), and action based upon that belief to guide their inquiry. In their qualitative study based on the perspectives of twenty-eight successful African-American male community college students, they gained insights on *how* spirituality may serve as an academic success factor for some students. The researchers found that the participants viewed their spirituality in a variety of ways: God as a confidante, spirituality as an inspiration for excellence, as providing life purpose, a means to overcome barriers, and minimizing relational distractions. According to the authors, "these important benefits of spirituality illustrate the importance of affirming students spiritually"(Wood & Hinton, 44).

In his study of African American male college achievers, Harper (2012) noted in his research that the majority of his participants were Christian. Even though many of the participants mentioned that their religious engagement was not always consistent, most participants noticed that they were more spiritual and prayed more during college. "Almost without exception, the achievers spoke extensively about God "working things out," "ordering their steps," and "directing their paths." They credited God for their high GPAs, scholarships and honors, leadership positions to which they had been elected, and the unusual opportunities they had been afforded" (p. 17).

Riggins, McNeal and Herndons (2008) sought to determine whether a connection between spirituality and academic achievement existed among a sample of Black male college students. They surveyed 13 African American males between the ages of 19 and 26 who were enrolled in a four-year historically Black university in the South. Riggins et al. identified three primary themes -- the use of prayer as a means to cope, the role of spirituality in their social constructs, and the social support that came through affiliation with a religious institution. The researchers noted that despite a great emphasis on the role of religion and a sense of the presence of God in their lives, the African American male college students evidenced high levels of internal locus of control which has been identified as one of the keys to student persistence and achievement (Bean, 2005).

Supportive Relationships

Researchers have found that college students spend the bulk of their time with their peers. With this time together, peers can have a strong impact on their lives, including their academic performance (Somers et al., 2008). Some researchers contend that peer relationships are an important part of the college experience for African American college students and promote student achievement (Gibson, 2005; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). They can often be viewed as a social and emotional comfort.

Palmer and Gasman (2008) studied peer relationships and academic achievement among African American male college students attending a Historically Black College. They found that peer support among Black students

played a vital role in their achievements. The study participants indicated that they felt more motivated and encouraged in schools because they wanted to maintain high grade point averages with their classmates within their major field of study. The study highlights the fact that African American college students have the capacity to surround themselves with people that will positively impact their academic achievement.

Strayhorn (2008) measured the relationship between academic achievement (as measured by grades in college courses), satisfaction with college, and students' supportive relationships with peers, faculty and staff. In this quantitative study, the 2004 administration of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) was used as a tool to survey 231 African American undergraduate men. The study shows that having supportive relationships with faculty and peers is associated with higher satisfaction levels for Black men in college, but does not necessarily improve grades. Supportive relationships may assist students in making the adjustment to college life and improve their sense of belonging. The findings of the study "suggest that those Black men who reported having frequent and varied supportive relationships with faculty, staff, and peers were more likely than other Black males to be highly satisfied with college"(p. 40).

Additionally, Harper (2006) studied African American male college students at the University of Illinois, Indiana University, The Ohio State University, University of Michigan, Michigan State University and Purdue. The researcher's goal was to gain insight into the experiences of African American

male college students at predominantly white universities and learn about their experiences of support from others. With 32 undergraduate participants, he focused on students with leadership in campus activities, relationships outside of class with faculty and campus administrators, and internships. Each participant was interviewed for two-three hours and had at least two follow up phone interviews.

Harper's (2006) findings suggest that peers played a significant role in the successes of the African American male college students studied. "No participant reported social ostracism or feelings of alienation from other African America students. Instead, they all described how peer support significantly enhanced their experiences as high achievers at predominantly White learning environments" (p. 347). The researcher's findings indicate that the participants found their relationships with African American peers to be the most uplifting and supportive. Additionally, when the study participants were asked to whom they accredit their academic success, the overwhelming response was:

- God,

- Themselves,

- Their parents,

- Their peers—almost always in that order (p. 347).

It is interesting to note that Fries-Britt (1998) found that there were many African American high academic achievers that entered college with minimal or no connections with other high academic achieving African American students.

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Mentoring

Murray (1991) defines a mentor as a person who offers his or her expertise to a student with the agreed-upon goal of having the student grow and develop specific skills and behaviors. In some cases, contact between a mentor and mentee may be limited, mentoring can involve any one of four key components:

- Providing emotional and/or psychological support

- Relationship focused on achievement

- Role modeling

- Direct interaction with the mentee (Jacobi, 1991, p. 513).

According to Tinto (1993), "African American boys require communities of men who can ensure their safe passage and celebrate—through ritual and ceremony, fellowship and membership their ascension to manhood" (p. 2). Many studies (Cuyjet, 1997; Brown, 2006; Harper, 2004, 2006) have identified a feeling of alienation as one of the reasons that African American males do not continue in higher education. Mentees appreciate the insight provided by their mentors on how to navigate through college life and getting acclimated to the culture of the campus where they attend school. "Since manhood has been reported historically as a complex task for Black males, it is imperative that their manhood is fostered at an early age by positive socializing agents and institutions" (Wyatt, 2000, p.24).

ACT Inc. (2010) conducted a national survey that sought to gain insight on strategies to retain students. The study found that professional mentoring

programs increased the number of African American students retained in community colleges and universities. The ACT study also found that providing professional mentors to minority students boosted their social development and intention to continue beyond a two-year program.

Wyatt (2009) found that professional mentoring programs that aim to support minority students, do improve their academic success and achievement among African American males and other minority groups. Additionally, the researcher found that minority students that were involved in mentoring programs showed greater percentages of career placement than those who were not involved in mentoring programs.

African American students generally have a strong connection to their racial identity. According to Quaye and Harper (2007), racial identity encourages a feeling of belonging and connection within an educational environment. Furthermore, Quaye and Harper assert that professional mentoring programs help shape students' attitudes about their campus and lessens the social obstacles that students may encounter. For African American students, professional mentoring creates a stronger connection to the college community and has the potential to improve retention (Carson, 2009).

Conversely, Brown (2009) studied the perceptions of African American male mentorship relative to their academic success. With seven African American male undergraduate student participants at a predominantly white institution, the researcher examined the students' self-efficacy, structure of support, and academic background. "A common theme from the interviews with

these young men was that African American males could be successful without

adult Black males playing a major rule in their tutelage…the interviews in this

study indicate that, with a solid overall support system, Black males can achieve

great success both personally and academically"(p. 5). Harper (2012) indicated

in his larger scale study that,

> no participant attributed even a fraction of his college achievement to
>
> a program that systematically matched him with faculty, staff, or peers
>
> with whom he was to routinely meet. Instead, they reflected mostly
>
> on relationships they cultivated with professors and high-level
>
> administrators (for example, the university president or dean of
>
> students) through engagement in clubs and enriching educational
>
> experiences (p. 18).

Grit/Resilience

An increased level of focus has been placed on the concept of grit as it

relates to students. Duckworth (2013, via Perkins-Gough) contends that there is

a difference between the concept of grit and resilience even though the two

terms are often used interchangeably. She defines resilience as having the

ability to bounce back after encountering difficulty situations. However, grit

encompasses not only the ability to bounce back, but also having a long-term

focus on a goal despite any adversity. "So grit is not just having resilience in the

face of failure, but also having deep commitments that you remain loyal to over

many years" (Perkins-Gough, 2013, p. 14).

The concept of resilience has been greatly influenced by the research of Garmezy and Rutter (1983). In their work, resilience is identified as a skill in which people demonstrate the ability to positively respond to stressful situations. Protective factors are tools that improve the individuals' ability to cope and improve chances for positive outcomes.   Rutter (1987) describes four key mechanisms dealing with negative events and demonstrating resilience:

1. Decreasing the impact of risk

2. Reducing additional negative events tied to an initial event (chain reaction)

3. Establishing and preserving self-esteem and self-efficacy

4. Producing new opportunities for success (Rutter, 1987).

Rutter (1987) also indicates that resilient individuals regularly cope with adversity successfully.

The current research on grit is limited, as very few studies explore the role of grit in the academic success of students. Duckworth and Quinn (2009) researched grit among 1,248 cadets at West Point United States Military Academy. In their work, they developed a questionnaire, the Grit-Scale questionnaire, whose purpose is to measure grit. The questionnaire is set up where "half of the questions are about responding resiliently to situations of failure and adversity or being a hard worker. The other half of the questionnaire is about having consistent interests—focused passions—over a long time" (Duckworth, 2013, via Perkins-Gough). Individuals that complete the questionnaire rate themselves on a series of 8 to 12 items. Examples of the questions asked include: "I finish whatever I begin". "I have overcome setbacks

to conquer an important challenge". The questionnaire is entirely self-reported, and a person completing the survey has to determine how much each statement describes them. Duckworth has found that a person's grit score is highly predictive of achievement under challenging circumstances.

Using Duckworth's Grit Scale, Strayhorn (2013) sought to determine how important of a factor grit is in the academic achievement of African American male college students attending a predominantly white college. The researcher administered the Grit questionnaire as developed by Duckworth (2007). The sample included 140 African American male college students that are enrolled full-time at a large predominantly White university located in the southeastern region of the United States. As a result of the study, Strayhorn found that "grittier Black males earned higher grades in college than their less gritty same-race male peers; grittier Black males also tended to have higher grades in high school and higher scores on the ACT" (Strayhorn, 2013 p. 5).

Features of Other Area Programs Targeting African American Males

Minority Achievement Committee (MAC) Scholars

The Minority Achievement Committee (MAC) Program was started at Shaker Heights High School to improve the academic achievement of African American male students. Shaker Heights is a suburb located on the east side of Cleveland, Ohio and serves about 5,500 students in eight school building (Schoolview, 2014). The program has received national attention having been featured on CNN and replicated in schools nationwide. It is also discussed in

John Ogbu's (2003) research, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement.*

In 1990, some of the faculty members wanted to see what factors contribute to the academic success of the African American male students. To gain insight, they asked some of the academically successful students. In their research and dialogue with the higher achieving students, came the idea to allow the more academically successful students to work with the students that were not. Students that earned below a 1.9 grade point average during their eighth grade year, called Potential Scholars, were invited to participate in the MAC Scholars program upon entering the ninth grade. The Potential Scholars were seen as students that were underachieving, and could benefit from participation in the program. The MAC Scholars serve as mentors for the Potential Scholars.

With oversight from faculty, the MAC Scholars essentially run the program. The MAC Scholars communicate their expectations of the Potential Scholars at an opening meeting. According to McGovern, the Potential Scholars are expected to:

- Attend the MAC meetings that take place every other week, unless the teacher deems it important to be present for a particular class session;

- Make up any assignments missed during a MAC Scholars meeting

- Exhibit respectful behavior among the Potential Scholars and MAC Scholars

- Demonstrate commitment to program through participation in meetings and truthful sharing of academic progress

- Improved academic performance (attendance, class participation, requesting extra help) as reported by classroom teachers (McGovern, p.8)

The Scholars determine the topics of focus for the meetings. Meeting topics range from why school is important, to good study habits, to confronting negative attitudes about school, making right choices, to the realities of being an African American male in the United States.

The MAC Scholars wear shirts and ties for each meeting, and along with the Potential Scholars, recite the pledge:

> *I am an African-American and I pledge to uphold the name and image of the African-American man. I will do so by striving for academic excellence, conducting myself with dignity, and respecting others as if they were my brothers and sisters.*

Closing the Achievement Gap (CTAG)

Former Ohio Governor, Ted Strickland, unveiled the Closing the Achievement Gap (CTAG) initiative in 2007. Its goal was to increase the number of African American males graduating from high school. The program targeted thirty-three schools throughout the state of Ohio with persistently low academic achievement and graduation rates for African American males. Under the Ohio Revised Code, school districts with a three-year overall average graduation rate of 80 percent or less were required to have a CTAG program in each "eligible

school." The Closing the Achievement Gap (CTAG) program began in ten Big Small City School District high schools.

Students were selected for participation as incoming high school freshmen based upon specific risk factors exhibited during their eighth grade year. Those risk factors include:

- Failed two or more core subjects in eighth grade
- Absent more than 20 percent of the year (which equates to about 36 days of school)
- Received five or more days of out-of-school suspension
- Over-age for grade (an indication of having possibly been retained in a grade) (Schoolwires, 2014a).

Even though students are not guaranteed an expense paid college education, they are set up with a system of social and academic support. As a student in the CTAG program, the students have access to a human resource in the school called a linkage coordinator. The linkage coordinator serves as a

> Mentor, motivator and life coach placed in targeted high schools to address and monitor the academic, social and emotional needs of select 9th grade male students. These individuals are required to orchestrate the collaboration of parents, teachers, administrators and community partners in an effort to successfully assist their student cohorts in closing the achievement gap (via clevelandmetroschools.org, accessed 09 November 2014).

Students remain in the program throughout high school. CTAG students benefit from quarterly tracking of student academic and social progress, regular parent contact by phone and home visits. In collaboration with the linkage coordinator, the students develop academic, attendance and behavioral goals. Additionally, the students have access to tutoring, referral for social service programs, advocacy for alternative disciplinary actions, exposure field trips and participation in community service activities.

In the fall of 2012, CTAG added a professional development component to the program. Through the professional development opportunities offered to District staff, the aim was to expose educators to culturally relevant pedagogy. The first cohort of CTAG students graduated from high school in 2011. During the first year of the program's implementation, 62 percent of the participating students had advanced one grade level, compared to 43 percent of the rest of the male freshman class. In addition, 9.1 percent of the first CTAG class did not return to school the following school year, compared to nearly 40 percent of students not in the program (Council of Great City Schools, 2011).

What Schools Can Do

Harper (2013) cites five things that student affairs administrators can do to improve success among college men of color.

- Start with standards—Harper and Kuykendall (2012) developed eight standards to use as a guide for the implementation of African American male campus initiatives. The standards have been adopted at several

universities and community colleges throughout the country. The

standards recommend that with all initiatives that seek to serve African

American male college students:

a.) the creation of activities is guided by the use of data;

b.) the college community collaborates with African American

undergraduate men to create and put campus programs in place;

c.) initiatives are guided by a written plan created jointly by a variety of

stakeholders;

d.) learning, academic achievement, student development and improved

degree completion is priority over social programming;

e.) programs are grounded in published research;

f.) insights from high achieving African American male students are

considered;

g.) honest conversations about racism are had and their harmful effects on

Black male student outcomes;

h.) all levels of the college community are held accountable for improving

Black male student retention, academic success, engagement, and

graduation rates.

- Recognize that they are not all the same--"Collecting and disaggregating

  various forms of data is an important way to avoid alienating some

students and inadvertently confusing the needs of one racial or ethnic group with those of another"(p. 5).

- Remember They, Too, Are Men

- Seek inspiration, not replication

- Form consortia and alliances—these alliances should work to support the needs of African American male college students.

Summary

In summary, there are many factors that contribute to the academic success of African American male college students.

Chapter III contains the methods used in the study, the setting in which the study will be conducted, followed by descriptions of the participants, population and sample. A detailed review of data collection followed by data analysis concludes the chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will explore the method of research, the theoretical framework that was employed, and discuss the sample population that was studied. The primary question that this study sought to address was, "To what factors do successful African American male college students attribute their success?" The researcher investigated:

1. What does academic success mean to African American male college students?

2. What attitudes, skills and behaviors do academically successful African American male college students possess?

3. What life experiences have affected the lives of academically successful African American male college students?

4. What are the implications for the instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students?

The research study used phenomenological qualitative methodology to examine the perspectives of African American male college students that have achieved academic success in the BW Scholars program. The study explored their life experiences, attitudes, skills, behaviors, and how those things enhanced

their ability to succeed academically. Taken from *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) provided a comprehensive definition of what qualitative research is, what it involves and what it provides:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

The researcher chose to use a qualitative approach for this study because of a desire to gain insight into the personal stories of each participant and to give voice to their experience, from their own voices. Merriam (2009) noted that "qualitative researchers are interested in *understanding the meaning people have constructed*, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world"(p. 13). Centered on the perspectives of the young men that have participated in the BW Scholars program, the study described here made every effort to understand their experiences as academically successful African American male college students. Additionally, this research attempted to

provide the opportunity for the participants to reflect and consider how their experiences shaped their viewpoints about their success.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) indicated that there are five characteristics of qualitative research. As the authors define it, qualitative research may not possess all five traits. Qualitative research is said to contain:

1. Naturalistic approach—Settings serve as a direct data source

2. Descriptive data—Data is expressed in words or pictures instead of numerically

3. Concern with process—Process of *how* people create meaning instead of just the results of *what* meaning was created is important

4. Inductive approach to data analysis--does not "search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 6)

5. Meaning—focus on the perspective of participants in the study. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.4-7)

The characteristics noted above applied to this study. As the participants in the study described their collegiate experiences inside and outside of the classroom, their participation in the college community, their families, their friendships and relationships within the college community, the setting in which they study came to the surface as a rich data source and provided a great deal of

information about their experiences as college students. As they described their experiences, the context in which these experiences occurred was critically important. While some aspects of their experience are quantifiable and can be expressed numerically, the vast majority of it was based on their unique perceptions and descriptions of them. The meaning of academic success for African American male college students was constructed by analyzing the unique experiences of each of the eight young men participating in this study. Additionally, the opportunity for them to share their unique experiences shed light on *how* the meaning of academic success was constructed for each participant.

Phenomenological Approach to Qualitative Research

"A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (Cresswell, 2007, p. 57). The goal of the work was to describe the commonalities of the participants, African American male college students, as they encountered an experience. In studying the shared experience of the BW Scholars program, the researcher strived to make meaning of the factors that contributed to the academic success achieved for each African American male college student participant. In making meaning of their academic successes, as they described their experience and the factors that contributed to their successes, insights were gained that aided in the development of practices that would yield success for this group on a broader scale. In turn, an increase in college retention, academic success and graduation for African American male college students will serve as

strong indicators of the benefits of this type of research and programming. Phenomenological researchers make every effort to get into the conceptual world of their study participants in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around the things that happen in their daily lives (Geertz, 1973).

"Phenomenologists do not assume they know what things mean to the people they are studying" (Douglas, 1976, p. 26). Reflecting back to those early experiences of learning to research in elementary and junior high school, leads me to think about the experience of learning about the scientific method. In a sense, Douglas (1976) conflicts with the process through which many of us have studied a phenomenon. We were taught early on to formulate a hypothesis and conduct research via trials in an experiment to justify or refute the hypothesis. Therefore, in conducting a phenomenological study, a paradigmatic shift is necessary so that no assumptions are made about what things mean to the participants of this study. This is different from the scientific method because in the scientific method, hypotheses are often formed based on some background information or prior experience. Because the aim is to make meaning of the experiences of the participants in the study, the researcher cannot come into the research process with an attitude of already knowing.

Phenomenological research is rooted in the philosophical writings of German mathematician Edward Husserl (1859-1938). Many researchers contend that all research is phenomenological research. Merriam (2002) emphasizes that phenomenological research is different though, because it

focuses on common experience shared by a group of individuals. Phenomenological research was an appropriate qualitative approach to this research because the participants in this study had common experiences of being African American male college students that graduated from a BSCSD high school, being in the BW Scholars program and achieving academic success. Each of the participants was able to speak directly to the things that contributed to their success and allow others to gain some insight. Phenomenology allowed the researcher the opportunity to study how successful African American male college students described their own experiences and allows others to see what can be learned from them.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher positioned this study through the lens of Harper's Anti-Deficit theoretical framework. Harper (2010) researched ways to attract more people of color into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields. "Instead of relying on existing theories and conceptual models to repeatedly examine deficits, researchers using this framework should deliberately attempt to discover how some students of color have managed to succeed" (Harper, 2010, p. 72). It is difficult to gain insight into success stories and means of success attainment for African American male college students if the focus remains on all of the negative statistics about them. Harper contended that those who have achieved success, who have remained in college and persisted through graduation can give information necessary to inform administrators, teachers, and policy makers in higher education. Actually, to gain

the best insight, what better way is there than to get it than from African

American male college students that have achieved academic success?

The ideology is that framing the interview questions of a study positively

will yield positive insights.   Additionally, the motivation for asking particular

questions must be considered. "Those who endeavor to improve student

success in STEM would learn much by inviting those who have been successful

to offer explanatory insights into their success" (Harper, 2010, p. 72). This does

not relate strictly to student success in STEM, but student's success, period. The

table below provides some examples of how Harper (2010) suggests that

researchers frame anti-deficit questions:

Deficit-Oriented Questions	*Anti-Deficit Reframing*
Why do so few Black male students enroll in college?	How were college aspirations cultivated among Black male undergraduates who are currently enrolled?
Why are Black male undergraduates so disengaged in campus leadership positions and out-of-class activities?	What compelled Black male students to pursue leadership and engagement opportunities on their campuses?
Why are Black male students' rates of persistence and degree attainment lowest among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education?	How did Black men manage to persist and earn their degrees, despite transition issues, racist stereotypes, academic unpreparedness, and other negative forces?

(*Taken from Harper, 2010, p.68*)

As the interview questions were developed for this study, I kept referring

back to the anti-deficit framework to ensure that my questioning did not

consistently come from a deficit standpoint. As I interviewed the participants for

this study, I strictly wanted the focus to be on the essence of their experience,

their success, and the conditions to which they attribute their success and not continue to focus on how challenging it must have been for them as a Black man considering all of the negative statistics.

Population

The BW Scholars program currently has four cohorts of African American male students chosen from three high schools in the Big Small City School District. The intake of the first cohort of Scholars occurred in 2003, the second cohort of Scholars began the program in 2007, the third cohort of Scholars began in 2011, and the most recent cohort began in Fall, 2015. The first two cohorts provided a potential population for the current study of approximately sixty African American male high school graduates, college students, college graduates or young men currently in the work force. The 2011 cohort of scholars are college freshmen. The most recent cohort of Scholars were seniors in high school. Given that the focus of this study is on college students and graduates, the Scholars that are in the two most recent cohorts are not identifiable as potential participants for this study.

Sample

The sample used for this study was a criterion sample (Creswell, 2007, p. 128). "It is essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied. Criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, p.128). All participants in this study experienced challenges in their academic program, participated in the BW Scholars program, and have achieved academic success.

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Academic success was determined by having achieved close to a minimum 2.0 grade point average and having completed at least three years of college. As Dukes (1984) recommends studying 3 to 10 subjects, my criterion sample consisted of 8 participants.

Participants for the study were selected with the assistance of gatekeepers (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). They are the individuals that have the ability to give researchers approval to conduct a study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Gatekeepers are used to support researchers in connecting and developing trust with the participants of the study (Hatch, 2002). Quite often, gatekeepers hold key positions and easier access to participants. The primary gatekeeper for this study was an informal gatekeeper, the BW Scholars Program Director.

With the assistance of the BW Scholars Program Director, each participant was carefully selected for participation in this study because of their ability to provide greater insight into the realities of successful African American male college students. Because of her close knowledge of the Scholars, she was able to assist the researcher in selecting a group of participants that were able to give great insight into the success of the African American male college students. In speaking of the program director, one Scholar stated that "she is like a mother to a lot of us...She always had faith in me, she was always telling me I could do better". African American male college students participating in this study have completed at least three years of college and have an approximate

2.0 minimum cumulative grade point average. Additionally, the participants met

at least two or more of the following criteria:

- Living in a high-poverty area

- Graduate of a Big Small City School District high school

- Growing up in a non-traditional family structure

- Non-college graduate parents

- Incarceration of a close family member

These criteria were chosen to define the types of challenges these young men

may have encountered in their formative years, and as a simplistic definition of

academic success.

Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected for this study by using semi-structured on-on-one

interviews with African American male students that are currently enrolled in a

college program and have been part of the BW Scholars program.   DiCicco-

Bloom and Crabtree (2006) indicated that semi-structured interviews are

"generally organized around a set of predetermined open-ended question, with

other questions emerging from the dialogue between the interviewer and

interviewee/s" (p. 315).   Data was tape recorded to ensure accuracy in the way

that each participant is represented.

The Program Director set up five of the interviews on my behalf. Those five interviews took place in one day, one after the other on the college campus, in a conference room adjacent to the Program Director's office. Simon, Tyrone, Chris, David and Keyshawn were all interviewed in one day. After each interview, a journal entry was made to make summary notes and to describe each participant. Terrell and Morris were interviewed via phone. I reached out to Gerald via Facebook, and his interview was conducted in his office.

The data from the recorded interviews was transcribed. Full transcripts from each interview was sent to each study participant within two weeks after his session to allow him to give feedback and to ensure proper representation of what each participant said during his interview.

Once the participants had the opportunity to review his transcript, there was an email follow-up with each participant to ask any clarifying questions. The follow-up was used as a time for the researcher to ask any clarifying questions that emerged from reading the transcriptions and as a time for the participants to clear up any misrepresentations from the initial interview, if necessary.

Individual Interviews

"An interview is a meeting of two persons to exchange information and ideas through questions and responses, resulting in communication and joint construction of meaning about a particular topic" (Esterberg, 2002, p. 83). As I conducted the interview for each study participant, I had an active role in the construction of what it means to be an academically successful African American

male college student. By listening to each participants' experiences, and probing

with the right follow-up questions, this meaning was developed. "Typically in the

phenomenological investigation, the long interview is the method to use through

which data is collected on the topic and question" (Moustakas, 1994, p.114). A

series of demographic questions was asked of each participant in which they

discussed their ages, background information about their high school that they

attended, and their career goals. Additionally, the participants were asked a

series of questions that aim to answer the research questions. The interview

contains eight demographic questions. There were twenty-four open ended

questions contained in the set of interview questions. While the general format

for each interview was the same, the interviewer varied the questions as the

situation deemed necessary (Lichtman, 2006).

Interviews were conducted in quiet places where the participants felt

comfortable. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour. Notes were not

taken during interviews to ensure that the full attention can be given to the

participants' responses. By giving full attention, the researcher was able to ask

relevant follow up questions as needed. Additionally, the researcher wanted to

build a level of comfort and rapport with each participant. It seemed that it would

be easier to achieve that goal with the participants, while sitting and having a

casual conversation, rather than taking notes.

Each participant completed an informed consent form and was given a

copy for their records. Each interview began with the reading of the informed

consent to ensure that each participant willingly agreed to participate in the study.

The interview questions were divided into five sections as they sought to guide the participants in providing insight and answers to the four research questions. The questions used for the interviews were as follows:

Demographic Questions	Where are you from? What high school did you attend? How old are you? What is your career goal? What is your grade point average? Discuss your family structure. What is your major or program of study? What year of study are you currently in?
Research Question 1. *What does academic success mean to African American male college students?*	What does academic success mean to you? Do you believe that you have achieved academic success? Explain.
Research Question 2. What attitudes, skills and behaviors do academically successful African American male college students possess?	Why are you successful in school? To what do you attribute your success? Do you have friends that are academically successful? Why are they or why are they not? What types of activities do you participate in on campus? What types of activities do you participate in outside of school? How many hours per week do you spend studying? Describe your role and activity in class. How would you compare your college friends versus your friends outside of college? How would you describe your interaction with your college instructors? How do your college instructors support your achievement? How do you interact socially on campus? Who or what plays an important role in your life that contributes to your educational goals?

Research Question 3. What life experiences have affected the lives of academically successful African American male college students?	Identify what experiences contributed to your academic success. What type of academic challenges have you experienced? How did you overcome them? How would you describe your academic experiences when you first started college? Were you well prepared to enter college? Explain. What are your priorities outside of your education? How encouraging is your family of you getting a college degree?
Research Question 4. What are the implications for the instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students?	What can colleges and universities do to best support you? What do you think is important for educators to do to support you in high school? In college? What can public schools do to better prepare their students for college?

Data Analysis

Moustakas (1994) recommends that researchers conduct epoche before

conducting a study. Epoche is a referred to as a process by which the

researcher takes time to document their beliefs and outline any assumptions that

they may have about the study participants. Epoche is the first step of the

phenomenological research process. It is an approach taken at the beginning of

the study by the researcher so that personal views of the phenomenon can be

set aside and focus can be placed on those views reported by the participants

(Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas suggests that "no position whatsoever is

taken...nothing is determined in advance;" the researcher remains present and

focuses on one's own consciousness "by returning to whatever is there

in…memory, perception, judgment, feeling, whatever is actually there" (p. 84). References to others, their perceptions and judgments must be put aside to achieve epoche.

Moustakas (1994) further articulates a data collection and analysis process that is outlined as follows:

1. Obtain a full description of experience using a phenomenological approach;

2. From the transcript of experience, (a.) consider the significance of each statement in relationship to the experience; (b.) record all significant statements; (c.) list each non-repetitive, non-overlapping statement. These are considered to be invariant or meaning units of the experience; (d.) relate and cluster the invariant meaning units into themes; (e.) apply the invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the experience using specific quotes and word-for-word examples; (f.) develop a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience.

3. From the verbatim transcriptions of each participant, complete the same process.

4. Construct composite descriptions of the meanings and essences of the experiences, integrating individual descriptions into a comprehensive description of the experience representing the whole group.

The data was analyzed for significant statements, and to see if themes emerged among the study participants that described the "essence" of their experiences as successful African American male college students. The research data collected from each of the participants was organized and coded.

Confidentiality

Data related to this study was acquired from students that met the criteria to participate in the study, and actually participated in the study (Creswell, 2005). Pseudonyms were used as a means to identify each participant. The actual identity of each participant was protected, as there is no reference to real names, contact information or personal information. Each participant selected his own pseudonym so that he is able to identify himself in the data transcriptions. Furthermore, the names of the high schools that each participant attended will not be provided to add an extra measure of identity protection.

Ethical Considerations

"Proper respect for human freedom generally includes two necessary conditions. Subjects must agree voluntarily to participate—that is, without physical or psychological coercion. In addition, their agreement must be based on full and open information" (Christians, 1995, p. 138). All participants in this study were provided with information about the purpose of the study and made aware that their identity and personal information will be protected. Additionally, no force was used to motivate individuals to participate.

Research participants were given full disclosure of the entire purpose of the study and were encouraged to provide honest responses to each interview question. This non-experimental study required informed consent and participants were entitled to withdraw at any time.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Before starting the data collection process, I submitted a proposal to the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is has the responsibility of protecting any human research subjects taking part of any study at CSU. The IRB proposal consisted of explaining the demographics of the proposed study, considerations for any special populations, provided a detailed project description, and discussed any possible risk or benefit to the study participants and how the researcher will handle these concerns.

Validity

Polkinghorne (1989) asserts that in order for research to be valid, it must be well grounded and well supported. Creswell (2005) highlights five questions that researchers must ask themselves to test the quality of a phenomenology study:

1. Does the researcher express understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology?

2. Does the researcher have a clear "phenomenon" to study that is expressed clearly and concisely?

3. Does the author use data analysis procedures in phenomenology as outlined by Moustakas (1994)?

4. Is the overall essence of the experience expressed by the researcher?

5. Is the author reflexive throughout the study? (Creswell, 2005, p. 216).

The researcher made every effort to address each of these considerations as highlighted by Creswell (2005). To be reflexive throughout the study, a journal was maintained as a tool to record notes, thoughts and wonderings. The researcher created the journal during the initial meeting with the BW Scholars program director.

Credibility

No information was placed in this study without providing the participants the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of its interpretation. Maxwell (2000) refers to this as "member checking", and contends that it is the single most important way of ensuring that there is not possibility of misrepresenting the meaning of what each of the participants said. Member checking was performed after the conclusion and transcription of each interview. Data was tape recorded to ensure accuracy in the way that each participant was represented. The data from the recorded interviews was transcribed. Full transcripts from each interview was sent to each study participant after his session to allow him to give feedback and to ensure proper representation of what each participant said during his interview.

Once the participants had the opportunity to review his transcripts, there was a follow-up email interview with each participant, if needed. The follow-up interview was used as a time for the researcher to ask any clarifying questions that emerged from reading the transcriptions and as a time for the participants to clear up any misrepresentations from the initial interview, if necessary.

The themes that emerged for each research question will be discussed. In order to identify the themes for each research question, an open coding process was used. I organized the participant responses in a chart and looked for commonalities in what each of the young men said. The themes were color coded and direct quotes for each participant were analyzed and organized by theme.

Researcher's Perspective

I grew up in a lower middle-class, hard-working, inner city neighborhood. My parents were and remain married, and I was raised as an only child with my mother and my father in our home. The majority of the children that grew up in my neighborhood grew up with both of their parents living in the home. I attended public city schools for the majority of my education, but went to an all-girl's Catholic school for ninth and tenth grade. I graduated from a liberal arts women's Historically Black College, and earned my Master's degree at a Big Ten University. I have spent 18 years in education with experiences in urban and suburban schools. I have worked as a classroom teacher, mathematics curriculum supervisor, academic coach and principal. The majority of my professional

experience has been in working in the very same district from which I graduated high school.

I have several reasons why this study is of particular interest to me. I am personally interested in finding out the factors to which African American males attribute their success because along with his father, I am the proud mother of an African American male child. I want to ensure that my son has exposure to the things to which African American male college students attribute their success.

This study is also of interest to me because I have another son that went to a predominantly white institution. While I did not give birth to him, and have an opportunity to raise him from infancy, he is my son. Prior to attending the four year predominantly white institution, he attended a local community college to complete prerequisite coursework. Upon entering the four year university, he was classified as a second semester freshman. After completing one semester there, he returned home and found full time employment, which he has maintained ever since.

I remember the phone conversation that we had about this one course that he had taken. I saw his grades for the semester, and he had earned an 'F'. I remember asking him if the material in the course was too challenging, had he completed all of the assignments, and how were his test scores? Then, I thought to myself, this boy can do anything he sets his mind to achieving. He must not have met the attendance requirements for the class. Sure enough, when I probed and asked about attendance, he shared with me a statement that was

made by one of his classmates. He felt that the statement was rooted in racism, and was angry that the class professor said nothing to correct the student that made the statement. He felt that the professor's lack of response communicated agreement. So, he stopped attending the class. He did not drop the class, fell behind, and obviously, did not pass the course.

I was so disappointed. I must say that there is nothing disappointing about the young man that he is though. He is responsible, thoughtful, self-sufficient, kind and an all-around good person. However, from that moment I have always wondered what I and the rest of our family could have done differently to help him get back to that school, kick butt in the classroom and graduate! I have always wondered if he went to a different school with a different set of supports would he have persisted and completed his degree? Interestingly, I never approached the conversation of what would have made *him* academically successful at that predominantly white institution.

Even more compelling in this situation is the fact that, as I reflect on my experience at my historically black, liberal arts women's college, I can unreservedly say, that would not have happened. I remember missing one of my economics classes once. I saw my professor in the cafeteria. He called me out, and said, "I see you eating in the cafeteria, but you missed my class! What's that all about?" The system of support was definitely there, and he was not even one of my professors with which I had a close-knit relationship!

Learning about the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males is relevant to me because of my career aspirations. It is my goal to make the transition to working in higher education. In my work on whatever college campus that I have the opportunity to serve, it is important to me to contribute to the success of African American males; especially since I see them as a reflection and reminder of all of the African American males that are so important in my life-- my husband, my sons, my father, grandfathers, uncles, male cousins and male friends.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the factors that contributed to the academic success of African American male college students. Using a phenomenological approach to qualitative research, the study explored the attitudes, skills and behaviors of successful African American male college students.

Through an interview process, and analyzing the data, the following research questions were investigated:

1. What does academic success mean to African American male college students?

2. What attitudes, skills and behaviors do academically successful African American male college students possess?

3. What life experiences have affected the lives of academically successful African American male college students?

4. What are the implications for the instructional programs that are in place to

   serve African American male college students?

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American male college students that have participated in the Baldwin Wallace University Scholars program (BW Scholars). This study explored the meaning of academic success for African American male college students and the attitudes, skills and behaviors that academically successful African American male college students possess. This study also investigated the life experiences that have affected the lives of academically successful African American male college students. Ultimately, the aim was to gain insight into these areas to determine the implications for instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students, so that those successes can be refined and replicated.

A great deal of research and emphasis has been placed on the struggles, challenges and shortcomings relative to African American male educational attainment and success. However, more work needs to be done to discover what promotes success for this group. The BW Scholars program aims to

ensure that its participants have the academic support and enrichment,

mentoring and career preparation components in place to get Scholars to their

high school commencement and onto college.

Research Questions

Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, this study researched the

following questions:

1.   What does academic success mean to African American male college

students?

2.   What attitudes, skills and behaviors do academically successful African

American male college students possess?

3.   What life experiences have affected the lives of academically successful

African American male college students?

4.   What are the implications for the instructional programs that are in place to

serve African American male college students?

The central question of this study is "What are the factors that contribute

to the success of African American men in college?" Interviews were held with

participants of this study to gain insight into that question. With the assistance of

the BW Scholars Program Director, eight participants were identified for this

study.

An email was sent to the BW Scholars Program Director describing the

purpose of the study and a sample of the type of questions that each participant

would be asked. The Program Director, in turn, forwarded the research study description to potential participants that took part in the BW Scholars program. She set up five of the interviews on my behalf. I ended up with a total of eight participants in the study.

The Participants' Narratives

Simon Fields

Simon is a twenty-two year old graduating senior at Baldwin Wallace University, where he is a computer science major. He grew up on the East side of Cleveland and attended George Washington High School. During his college career, he has earned a 3.015 grade point average and his career goal is to become a technology consultant. He would like to own his own consulting firm and provide cutting edge technology for new business owners, and help them get their businesses established.

Simon was raised by his grandmother, along with his older sister and older brother. He attended two high schools prior to George Washington, both of which he was kicked out for constant fighting. During his junior and senior years of high school, Simon's grandmother became ill and he had to take care of her. She passed away during his senior year of high school. With her passing, Simon "lost everything". When she died, there were no other relatives in the area with whom Simon could live. At the time, his sister was serving in the military and stationed in Texas. She offered to let him stay with her. "But as a man, I did not see that as the way to go. I did not want to burden my sister because I felt so

independent taking care of my grandmother and myself at the same time. I considered myself an adult and I felt too independent to go stay with her."

Now homeless, Simon was able to stay on campus at Baldwin Wallace. The BW Scholars program director was able to secure on campus housing for Simon, where he worked to live on campus during the summer prior to his freshman year. During school break times, he had to find places to live. To support himself financially throughout college, Simon worked as a mentor in the BW Scholars program, and as a cashier clerk at a local drug store. He taught himself how to repair phones and computers and has a small business repairing those electronic items.

Tyrone Thomas

Tyrone is a twenty-two year old college senior. He attends Baldwin Wallace University and is a Business administration major. He attended George Washington High School and grew up in project housing on the southeast side of Cleveland. He is the youngest of eight children and is the first to graduate from high school and attend college. Ultimately, he wants to become an entrepreneur and own several family businesses (i.e. stores, restaurants, barber shops) throughout the city. Tyrone was raised in a single mother household. His mother always worked two or three jobs. His parents separated and did not remain together, but his mother remarried.

Tyrone sees his biological father about five times a year. When he was younger, he "really didn't care too much about my stepfather, because he always

wanted that to be my biological father in that role." Tyrone wanted his biological father to live in the home with him and the rest of his family. However, over the years he developed a positive relationship with his stepfather and has a great deal of respect and admiration for the role that he took on in his life and the lives of his mother and siblings.

When Tyrone was in the ninth grade, just entering high school, all four of his brothers were incarcerated. He remembered seeing "all the pain, and all the hurt that brought" to his mother, knowing all the lifestyles that his brothers lived. Based on his behavior at school, he thought that he was going down that same road and may end up in prison with his brothers. He explained, "I was looking at their lifestyles and I would try to emulate that back in the neighborhoods where I was at." Tyrone was not really going to class, or focusing on school, and began experimenting with drugs during high school.

Tyrone was chosen to participate in the BW Scholars program, graduated high school, and was admitted to Baldwin Wallace University for his undergraduate studies. During his first semester in college, Tyrone struggled with the college transition. He did not want to ask for help with his course work or studying because he just did not believe in asking for help. He earned a 0.7 grade point average during that semester. Despite the low GPA, Tyrone stayed enrolled at Baldwin Wallace, focused on his studies, and currently, his cumulative undergraduate grade point average is a 2.5.

Chris Peters

Chris is a twenty-one year old junior at Baldwin Wallace University. He grew up on the southeast side of Cleveland, Ohio and is majoring in Communications. Chris began his college career as a computer science major, but changed his major to Communications. As a Computer Science major, Chris realized that when he was doing a lot of the programming, it took a lot of sitting in front of the computer and he just did not want to do that for the rest of his life.

Chris is one of eight children and was raised by his mother. His relationship with his father was loving, but his dad just could not be around all of the time. Chris works two jobs, one as a mentor in the BW Scholars program, and he also works in the university library. He is the first person in his family to attend college. For this reason, he feels a great deal of pressure to do well and complete his degree. During his first semester at Baldwin Wallace, Chris scheduled what he described as some of the "hardest classes that you could take at BW." During his second semester, he was placed on academic suspension, so he had to attend a local community college for two semesters instead of the university. He focused and studied a great deal while attending the community college and was re-admitted as a student into Baldwin Wallace. His grades are now "getting back to where they should be". He currently has a 1.9 cumulative grade point average.

Keyshawn Clay

Keyshawn is a twenty-one year old senior at Baldwin Wallace University. He grew up on the southeast side of Cleveland, Ohio and graduated from George Washington High School. He is an International Business major and his professional goal is to work for a marketing firm, and travel to assist different customers in marketing their products and services. Keyshawn has a 3.1 grade point average. He grew up in a single mother household. His father moved out of the home when he was five years old. Keyshawn has four older sisters, is the only boy, and he is the youngest child. His father went to jail when he was about seven years old. He was sentenced to four years. His father's imprisonment did not diminish their relationship, and Keyshawn contends that they have a "great relationship 'til this day". Keyshawn indicated that he can "call him and talk to him about anything."

Keyshawn currently shares an apartment with his high school sweetheart, and works a full-time job in the authorization department for a credit card company. Keyshawn and his girlfriend are the proud parents of a seven-month-old son. He began his college career at a Historically Black College located about three hours away from his Cleveland home. He transferred because he felt that the coursework was too easy and he wasn't being challenged enough. He learned that the school has an extremely low graduation rate, and so he just left. He moved to another large university, located about thirty minutes south of Cleveland, but soon realized that he wanted to be closer to the BW Scholars program, so that he could receive direct support from the program and more

easily participate in programs, and initiatives that it sponsors. Keyshawn transferred to Baldwin Wallace during his sophomore year. When he arrived at Baldwin Wallace, he realized that the professors were not as easy as he previous two schools. He indicated that "it got real coming to BW". He felt that the coursework was not as easy as it had been at the first two universities that he attended. He had to really focus, study and apply himself to earn his grades. Keyshawn is the first in his family to attend college, and he inspired other members of his family to attend college as well, including his father.

David Spade

David is a twenty-six year old college graduate. He grew up on the east side of Cleveland, and attended a total of nine schools within the Big Small City School District during grades kindergarten through twelve. He grew up in a single-mother household along with four sisters.   He is a member of the first cohort of BW Scholars and graduated from high school in 2007. He graduated from Cleveland State University in 2014. Although David attended and graduated from Cleveland State University, he was able to remain part of the BW Scholars program. He continued to participate in the various activities associated with the program, and stayed connected to the Program Director and other members of his cohort.

David began his college career as a special education major. He changed his major because as he was completing the practicum experience, he realized that for a variety of reasons, being a K-12 special education classroom teacher

was not his true passion. He switched his major to sociology and criminology and would ultimately like to serve as a dean at a college or university. His career in higher education is well underway, as he is currently employed as a program assistant at Baldwin Wallace. He works as a direct support to the Director of the BW Scholars program. He aspires to enroll in graduate school in the not so distant future. His undergraduate grade point average was a 2.4. David is the first in his family to attend college and indicated that he "never really had a core group of friends because we moved a lot. I have people that I still know and that I hung out with outside of school, but we were really almost always on the go. And that's probably where the instability comes from and the lack of structure, which is why I'm so versatile and unorganized at the same time." David is proud that he pledged to and became a member of the "Oldest and Coldest" African American male fraternity.

Gerald Rose

Gerald is a 26 year old college graduate. He grew up on the southeast side of Cleveland, Ohio and is a 2012 graduate of Baldwin Wallace University. He is a member of the first cohort of BW Scholars, and graduated from Malcolm X High School. While at BW, Gerald was an English major with an emphasis on public relations. He began as an English major so that he could become a teacher, but during student teaching realized that education was not his passion. He wanted to finish school with a degree that would not keep him in school for too many extra years, so he focused on public relations and was able to complete his degree in five years. Gerald maintained a 2.8 grade point average.

Gerald is a proud member of "The Oldest and Coldest" African American male fraternity, which he pledged during his sophomore year of college.

Gerald is from a single parent household where his mother raised him. He remembers that anytime he "needed a male to kick him in the butt, his mother would call his cousins or his uncles". He met his dad when he was twenty-two years old. By the time that he turned twenty-five, they attempted to establish a relationship, although it has not been that successful. Yet, Gerald feels that it is good to know that his father wanted to meet him and at least made an effort to get to know him.

Gerald currently serves as the youth pastor for a local church, and his career goal is to become senior pastor of a church. He is enrolled in graduate level courses in Theological Studies. He is married and he and his wife are expecting their first child.

Morris Brown

Morris is a twenty-five year old college graduate. He graduated from Baldwin Wallace University in 2011 and maintained a 2.8 grade point average. Morris is a member of the first cohort of BW Scholars. He grew up on the southeast side of Cleveland, Ohio. Morris was raised by his mother and lived with her along with his two older brothers. His mother worked many hours, and he had a stepfather who he believed was not much help in supporting the family financially. Morris met his biological father at the age of twelve and did not see him again until he was twenty-two years old. While he was in high school,

Morris's mother was injured at work. His mother never graduated from high school or obtained her GED.

After the work-related injury, it was difficult for Morris's mother to find and maintain employment. Morris got his first job at a local fast-food restaurant at the age of fourteen. He took care of his mother and paid all of the bills to support their family. Throughout college, Morris continued to work full-time at the same fast-food restaurant. He was a swing shift manager and got promoted to assistant store manager. He usually worked forty-five to fifty hours per week, and he maintained full-time status as a college student.

Morris graduated from BW with a degree in criminology. He is currently a probation officer in a local community and serves as an engineer in the Army National Guard. His career goal is to earn promotions in the military and become a more valuable asset to the military. He has always had a desire to serve and protect his country. He is the proud father of a ten-month old son.

Terrell James

Terrell is a twenty-six year old college graduate. He grew up on the east side of Cleveland, Ohio. He is a graduate of Malcolm X High School. Terrell was raised in a two-parent household, as his parents were and still are married. His father is a high school graduate and his mother earned a bachelor's degree. At one point during his kindergarten through twelfth grade education, Terrell was home-schooled for three years. He has one sister who is seven years his junior. Even though Terrell had three different majors while enrolled at Baldwin Wallace,

he graduated in four years. He began his college career as a sociology major, then changed his major to accounting. He is a 2011 graduate of Baldwin-Wallace University, and received his degree in Finance.

Terrell maintained a job at a grocery store close to campus throughout his collegiate career. While he did benefit from a full scholarship because of his participation in the BW Scholars program, he still worked to support himself. He did not want to depend on his parents, as they had their own finances to handle. He maintained a 3.0 grade point average during his undergraduate career. He currently works as a flight attendant with a major airline, and ultimately he would like to become a published writer.

Terrell discussed that in high school, he did not really feel accepted by his peers.

> I didn't have the type of clothes that everybody else did, I didn't dress the way everybody did. I didn't talk the way everyone else did, I didn't talk broken English, so I guess I really wasn't relatable. Then, you pay attention, you're favored by teachers. You either get admired for it or talked about for it. A lot of times, I got talked about for it.

Terrell currently lives in Atlanta, Georgia and aspires to attend graduate school to obtain a Masters' degree.

The following table summarizes demographic information for the participants of the study.

Table 1

Summary of Demographic Information for Study Participants

Pseudonym	Simon Fields	Tyrone Thomas	Chris Peters	Keyshawn Clay	David Spade	Gerald Rose	Morris Brown	Terrell James
Age	22	22	21	21	26	26	25	26
Current Year of Study	Graduating senior	Senior	Junior	Graduating Senior	2014 Graduate of Cleveland State University	2012 Graduate of Baldwin Wallace	2011 Graduate of Baldwin Wallace	2011 Graduate of Baldwin Wallace
Current career	Student at Baldwin Wallace	Student at Baldwin Wallace	Student at Baldwin Wallace	Student at Baldwin Wallace	Program assistant for BW Scholars program	Youth pastor at a local church	Probation officer and Engineer in the Army National Guard	Flight attendant
Family Structure	Raised by grandmother along with older brother and sister	Raised by my mother who always worked two or three jobs. Youngest of eight children.	One of eight children raised by my mother	Grew up in a single mother household. Currently lives with girlfriend and their infant son.	Single parent mother. Youngest of five children, the only boy.	Raised by single mother.	Lived with mom along with two other brothers.	Raised by both parents, they are still married. One sister who is 7 years younger
College Major/ Program of Study	Computer Science	Business Admin	Communications studies	International Business	Sociology and Criminology	English with emphasis on public relations	Criminology	Finance
Undergrad Grade Point Average	3.015	2.5	1.9	3.1	2.4	2.8	2.8	3.0

Table 1

    There are four research questions that were considered for this study. In the next section of this chapter, each of the four research questions will be re-stated. After re-stating the research question, the questions that were asked

during the participant interviews will be outlined, and the themes that emerged for each research question will be presented and clarified.

Research Question One. What does academic success mean to African American male college students?

The participants were asked to define what academic success means to them and discuss whether or not they believe that they have achieved academic success. In reviewing participant responses to the questions, three themes emerged as the ways in which academic success is defined by their standards. According to the participants of this study, academic success is defined as:

- Application of things learned

- Graduation

- Use of resources

Theme One: Being Able to Apply What Was Learned

According to the participants in this study, academic success entails being able to apply what was learned in the classroom to the outside world. Five out of eight participants believed that academic success is having the ability to apply the things learned in the classroom to different situations and to use the knowledge gained in career work situations. Keyshawn stated that, academic success is:

Learning the material. I know a lot of us students do enough to get by, but are you able to maintain the information that you are learning and apply it? I feel good the next day after class if someone can come to me and ask me about a problem we did in class, or ask me about what we learned and I can tell them instantly and help them out.

Simon answered that he views academic success as, "taking what you have learned in the classroom and being able to apply it to the outside world. I don't think you can get graded on stuff like that." Likewise, David indicated that academic success is,

Getting the most out of the classroom and showing that you can apply that information…. It's more than just what you get inside the classroom, it's also the stuff that goes on outside the classroom academically too…. I define it as applying what I learned to have an impact.

David truly demonstrated that belief, as he kept himself involved in a myriad of activities throughout his college career to support others and make an impact on the environment around him. In his efforts to have an impact on others, David served as a resident assistant, director of community outreach in the student government association, served on committees to register students to vote, and as a peer mentor coach. Additionally, he was the vice president of his fraternity chapter on campus.

Terrell explained that,

Your academic success really works for you. Your academic success is not just having an education, but being able to feel like you can utilize the profession. So, academic success to me is not just getting your education, but making your education work for you as far as making your life better. There are a lot of people who have college degrees but in the workforce it doesn't really translate or open as many doors as they would have expected.

Included in the idea of being able to apply what was learned, Chris took the point further by explaining that academic success also involves "figuring out what you have to do to get better. So, if you come in with a 'C' average, how much better can you get? Just because you have a 'C' average, that doesn't mean that you didn't learn it." His view illustrates that a student must apply knowledge of self and the things that one learns about self to apply to their learning situation.

Theme Two: Graduation

Five of the eight participants defined academic success as graduation from high school and college.

Morris stated that,

Being able to get that degree at the end of the day, and walk across that stage within four years when so many people don't was what was important to me. So, being able to do that, while working full time and living on my own, taking care of my own bills, going back and forth to

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work, getting through the work with everything on my plate. My main goal was to graduate.

Considering that Morris juggled a full-time job along with full-time studies, financial responsibility for himself and his family at home, his graduation in four years was quite an accomplishment. In addition to his coursework and full-time job, he participated in the psychology, sociology and criminology clubs on campus when he was able. Although he experienced a high level of responsibility, Morris was one of the first to graduate from college among his cohort of BW Scholars.

When asked if he believes that he has achieved academic success, Gerald responds, "Well, I graduated. I'll say that. To some extent, I know that I was successful. I definitely have a piece of paper that shows something." Terrell says that academic success is "of course completing your degree". Tyrone adds, "That's the main goal of the BW Scholars program, you have to graduate."   The participants of this study are very clear on the idea that academic success equates to persistence and degree completion regardless of whatever obstacles they encountered. At the time of the interviews for this study, Gerald, Terrell, and Morris had earned their college degrees and Tyrone was a senior in college.

Theme Three: Use of Resources

Four of the eight participants determined that academic success involves making use of the resources that are available as a college student. Tyrone talked about the fact that academic success involves "not being afraid to ask for

help. We don't like to ask for help and that was something that really hindered my academic success as a freshman." Because he earned a 0.7 grade point average during his first semester in college, Tyrone returned to school and made use of tutoring services, the extra help of his professors, office hours, and whatever tools available and necessary to improve his grades and ensure his academic success.

David drove the point further that a large part of academic success is "utilizing the resources that come with the academic piece at whatever university you attend". In addition, Simon talked about the fact that "different situations call for different things". In those different situations, the participants contended that it is imperative that they knew how to use the available resources to react to a given circumstance. It must be noted that David worked as a peer mentor while on campus, in an effort to help others understand how to study, and educate them about the tutoring resources available. He made the point that part of academic success is developing enough understanding of self to know when to tap into those available resources. Additionally, Simon believed that listening to some of the messages taught to him throughout the BW Scholars program demonstrated wise use of the available resources. Because he became homeless right before his transition to college, he felt that he learned a great deal about building the character that was necessary to survive in society. It was during the high school component of the BW Scholars program that Simon learned about time management, and the way that he should carry himself in different situations, particularly as an African American male coming from the

inner-city to attend a predominantly white liberal arts university. Putting those lessons of time management, use of tutoring resources, proper etiquette, and how to carry himself into practice at the appropriate time was paramount and seen as a part of Simon's definition of academic success.

Interestingly, none of the participants expressed the belief that academic success is strictly defined by the grades or grade point average earned in school. Simon held the notion that "academic success does not depend on how high your GPA is or the grades that you get." Even though Gerald was the only participant that shared that he believed that "academic success deals with grades and succeeding in college", he went on to say that,

> I think a lot of stuff plays a part in your grades and being successful in
> college---the people that you hang out with, your support system, how
> you're able to stay away from home, the organizations that you are a part
> of, the drive and determination of the peers and the people that you have
> around you. There are so many influences.

Aside from Gerald and Tyrone, the participants' definitions of academic success fell into one of three categories—being able to apply what was learned, graduation, and use of available resources, which were coded as themes. Even though Gerald replied that so many different things influenced his academic success, he was clear on the fact that his college graduation showcased his achievement of academic success. Tyrone declared that academic success involves "being self-disciplined, and knowing what works best for you as a

student." He also mentioned that part of academic success was participating in the leadership activities and community service initiatives that were part of the BW Scholars program—examples of Tyrone making use of the available resources.

Regardless of their cumulative grade point averages, which ranged from 1.9 to 3.1, all of the participants shared the belief that they had achieved academic success. Additionally, because they had graduated from college already, or were on track to complete their college degree, participants believed that they had achieved academic success. According to the participants of this study, academic success means having the ability to apply the knowledge and skills they learned. Success is achieved through being able to transfer knowledge to real world settings and have an impact. The participants of this study also equated academic success to graduating from college, and having the ability to make use of resources. The next section will explore the attitudes, skills and behaviors that academically successful African American male college students possess.

Research Question Two: What attitudes, skills and behaviors do academically successful African American male college students possess?

In order to explore research question number two, the participants were asked a series of questions in which they discussed why they were and are successful in school, to what factors they attribute their success, whether their friends are academically successful, and the activities that they participated in

on-campus and off-campus. Additionally, they were questioned about their roles and activities in the classroom. The interviews required the study participants to recall how many hours per week they studied and to compare the academic achievement, characteristics, behaviors and attitudes of their college friends versus their non-college friends. The participants described their interactions with their college professors, how their professors support their achievements, and if there was anyone or anything that was a major contributor to their educational goals.

In reviewing the responses of the participants, five major themes emerged as attitudes, skills and behaviors that they attributed to their academic success as African American male college students. According to the participants in this study, academically successful African American male college students:

- Are receptive to the support of family, mentors and friends

- Are careful about choices in friends

- Have a strong work ethic

- Use their time management skills

- Possess drive, grit and determination to complete their degree

Theme One: Support of Family, Mentors and Friends

Participants in this study cited the support of key people in their lives as a key factor in their academic successes. All eight of the participants of the study

mentioned that they gained support from a variety of sources: their mothers, friends, other BW Scholars, professors, mentors, the program director, or other family members. Gerald made a statement that seemed to summarize the thoughts for all eight of the participants,

> In college, I had a gang of people that wanted to see me succeed and they would do whatever they needed to do to help me in that process…People that supported me until the end, that's one of the main reasons that I made it through.

In the absence of his mother, and the after the passing of his grandmother, Simon reflected on the influence of a close mentor that he had throughout college, Mr. Land.

> Mr. Land was one of my mentors when I was in the BW Scholars program. He never let me give up on stuff. I wanted to just drop out of the program, I just wanted to go get a job, make minimum wage and just live off of that. But, he would always tell me, 'Man, you are better than that. You deserve more than that.' He always pushed me to do better for myself. I finally got the message. He helped me and I took it and ran with it. Still, till this day, we're still friends. He calls me from time to time and puts a good word in my ear.

Just by sharing kind word, pushing and encouraging Simon, Mr. Land is credited with having a role in Simon's academic success.

Mothers. Because the majority of the participants of this study were raised in single mother households, it is important to explore the perceptions of the support that the mothers of these young men gave to their sons. Of the eight participants in this study, seven were raised in single mother households. Five of the eight participants mention the fact that their mothers were people that played an important role in their lives that contributed to their educational goals and success. Terrell reflected on his mother's influence by saying,

> My mother, I would say is the key person in making me want to go to school and be successful… My mother has a Bachelor's degree. She was the one who home-schooled me for three years and I think I really got my passion for writing from her because she would read a lot… Part of my curriculum with her was that every summer she would make me participate in a summer reading program and we would have to write reports. So, it's kind of like the stuff that I hated growing up that my mother forced me to do is what became my skill as I got older. I owe a lot of who I am and the type of person that I am to my mother.

Keyshawn discussed the fact that his mother played an important role in contributing to his educational goals as well. As the first one in his family to leave and go off to college, he communicated that he "is just looking to make my mother proud and now my son as well".

Tyrone and David also described their mothers as having key roles in their educational goals. As Tyrone talked about the support of his mother, he

indicated that she was proud of him, but was limited in the *type* of support that she could offer to him.

> My mother hasn't experienced what I have. She hasn't gone as far as I have as far as education. When I talk to my mother about college and things that I'm going through, she can't relate because she never experienced college life.

David held a similar belief and went on to explain that, with

> My mother, the worst thing about coming from a home where nobody went to college is that they don't understand the experience. They get to see what you do and think that you're just up there chillin' and having a good time. But, the work that goes into it, they don't see it, and they really can't support you. It was tough and I hope I'm not bitter at my mom about it. But it was just a 'keep going Baby' type of thing. She's never been in this, so she really can't give me that much encouragement because she's never been down that road. I know it's hard, but she can't relate. She always told me how proud she was that I was going. She never told me that I had to go to college, she just wanted me to be happy at what I do.

Despite the fact that their mothers were unable to attend college, and there were some challenges in their mothers' understanding of the realities of college life, David and Tyrone still view them as contributing factors in their academic successes.

Program Director. The Director of the BW Scholars program has served in her role since the program's inception in 2003. She organizes all aspects of the program, and is responsible for the recruitment and selection of the BW Scholars. She coordinates the academic enrichment component of the program in which the Scholars are provided with academic tutoring and Ohio Graduation Test preparation sessions. The tutoring takes place during the school year, and during the summer the young men take part in the Summer Academy at Baldwin Wallace University, where the curriculum focuses on academics, building leadership skills, life skills and career readiness. The program director organizes the mentoring and leadership development component of the program in which the Scholars are mentored by African-American male students that already attend Baldwin-Wallace. The program director also ensures that the Scholars get involved in the community through monthly community service activities, attending leadership conferences and training sessions. The program director also organizes the career preparation and internship component of the program. The Scholars experience a five-week summer internship, participation in career exploration, readings, résumé writing and interview practice (Norris, 2014).

At some point during each interview, the majority of the participants talked about the program director as someone who had an impact on their academic successes. When the participants were asked more specifically about the program director, and what is it about her that is so encouraging and has impacted their academic success, Simon stated that,

She loves what she does. She has a passion for it. She doesn't just work a nine to five. She integrated it with her life. I don't think there is anybody that can do a better job than she does because you really have to have some type of love for the students that you're working with in order to do some of the stuff that she does… She really has a drive and determination to see people succeed out of these situations.

When Simon became homeless after the death of his grandmother, the program director went outside of her job description to make sure that he had somewhere to live.

Gerald unequivocally stated that,

She is a BEAST! She sticks with it even when people tell her she shouldn't. She has a Master's in Education, a wealth of experience, so many programs in Cleveland want her, but yet, she does not give up or forget the goal. Her goal was to help Black men. Period. I am sure people have offered her double what she is making right now, but she understands that those finances won't fuel her passion for making sure that young men get what they need to become successful.

It must be mentioned that Gerald connected his involvement in the BW scholars program and the program director to many of the milestones in his life, his graduation from high school, his graduation from college, and meeting his wife. He noted that, "I am not exaggerating when I say—I owe her EVERYTHING!"

The program director was seen as a mentor and a mother figure away from home by many of the participants. Chris unreservedly talked about how the program director is "always there. She's stern and she makes sure that we stay on top of our game."

As Tyrone shared that his mother never went to college, he says that the program director "has experienced college life and is the one who really gave me this opportunity and without her, I wouldn't even be here. She is the one who really helped me with the educational qualities that I have."

Terrell talked about the fact that the program director cared about the BW Scholars.

> That caring aspect that she put down is what made it so beneficial. Some of the guys did not have a good maternal figure in their lives. She became that. A lot of times, when the boys got in trouble at school, the first person that they would call is her before their parents. Honestly, she offered a lot of the stability and consistency that a lot of them didn't get. You have somebody constantly calling you saying you have to be at work, we have to go to this event, you have to make sure that you are on top of this, I heard that you were doing this. Actually having someone show that they care. People recognize when somebody cares.

In the program director, the participants found a mother figure, someone who cared, checked on their progress, and never let up. Almost all of the participants recognize her as a motivator and contributor to their academic success.

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Other Scholars in the Program. An integral part of the BW Scholars program is the fact that the young men in the program spent each summer in high school at Baldwin Wallace, taking classes and gaining exposure to the collegiate experience. Additionally, the young men participated in study tables together three times a week. Once they became college students, a bond was already formed amongst the young men in the BW Scholars program. Gerald indicated that,

> We tried our best to not allow each other to fail. Though we were in college and we had fun-- we probably had too much fun, I think at some point in time, it was embarrassing to have a 'D'. It was embarrassing to fail. Because even though we had a lot of fun, and probably did some crazy things, it still was a standard that you want to uphold. And to be a minority when it comes to BW as a school and Berea as a city, you don't want to make your particular ethnicity look crazy. Not going to class, not doing your work, not accomplishing what you need to accomplish. At the end of the day, it would make the entire body of people look bad. So, we tried our best to make sure that you do what you have to do.

Expressing similar beliefs to Gerald, Terrell stated that,

> As far as the scholarship program, the bond that we created as far as men in the program, really carried over into college. Mainly because we were always at Baldwin Wallace throughout high school with the program, and now we're embracing this new independence of having the responsibility

of being a student on our own. So, we kind of relied on each other. I mean, we broke apart and had our own separate majors, but we tried our best to hold each other accountable as best we could. We knew we were still setting an example of being the first set of boys out of the program, but also with the friendship and the brotherhood that we created, we didn't want to see the other person fail. So, we tried to hold each other accountable the best way we could when we interacted with each other.

The camaraderie and friendship that the members of the BW Scholars program created served as a factor in their academic success. Morris even went so far as to say, "It was like *family*. We got really close and we did everything together. We played football together, basketball together and we studied together."

Theme Two: Careful About Choices in Friends

Participants in this study acknowledged the importance of selecting and having the right type of friends to make their educational goals a reality. It must be noted that all of the participants shared the belief that they were academically successful. Additionally, all eight of the participants indicated that they had friends that they believed were academically successful as well and they *chose* to surround themselves with academically successful friends.

Morris discussed the fact that he,

Tried to back away from some of those friends that I thought I would get into trouble with that I couldn't get out of. A few of my friends ended up getting shot. One of my friends, it seemed like every time I was with them,

trouble always found us. It never failed. There were times when we'd be out playing basketball, and we'd end up getting into a fight.

Morris went on to credit the fact that being away from home helped him and the choices that he made in friends may have kept him out of trouble. He recalled, "Being away from that atmosphere really helped me because he ended up being locked up and going to prison. If I had stayed there during the summer time, I could have quite easily ended up somewhere else". Along the way, Morris developed a friendship with a young lady that he referred to as his "female best friend. She was always there for me during the dark times. I met her when I was working at the fast-food restaurant. So, we've always been close. I would say that she helps to keep me motivated."

When Terrell reflected on his friendships, he mentioned that,

The ones that I had in high school, the ones that I chose to hang around were successful, and a lot of them were part of the Scholars program and some of them weren't…We had similar career goals… So, having people around me that were like minded in high school was really what helped.

It is interesting to note that Simon mentioned that, "My friends that are academically successful, I met them in high school and I surrounded myself with people that had the criteria that I had to associate with them." When asked about the criteria that he used to associate with people, Simon reflected on his past experience of being angry in high school, and being kicked out of two high schools before being selected for participation in the BW Scholars program.

When Simon got selected for the Scholars program, he indicated that "it shifted his life". He wanted to surround himself with individuals that had goals and were working hard to achieve them. Likewise, Tyrone stated that he believed that, his friends

> Are academically successful because that's who I try to surround myself with, and I am around people who have the same aspirations and the same goals as me in life. People who are really determined to graduate college and move on to the next step in life, you know.

The participants in this study demonstrated a high level of maturity in their choices in selecting and maintaining friendships. They all make mention of the fact that on some level they had to consciously choose the people that they would keep as friends, and used qualifying characteristics to make that determination.

Theme Three: Strong Work Ethic

According to the participants of this study, having a strong work ethic was a major factor in their ability to achieve academic successes. The amount of time that each participant reported that he studied on average each week ranged from about three hours to forty hours. The average amount of study time reported among the participants was about 17 hours per week. Table Two summarizes the number of hours that each participant reported that he studied on average each week.

Table 2

Average Number of Hours Spent Studying Each Week

Name	Simon	Tyrone	Chris	Keyshawn	David	Gerald	Morris	Terrell
Number of Hours Studying (per week)	40	25-30	14	Depends on week and assignments due, 9-10	9-10	Depends on week and assignments due, 3-5	20	15

Table 2

In their discussion of academic success, the idea of hard work was mentioned as a key factor in achieving academic success. David declared that, "One thing that I learned in college is the people with the highest GPA doesn't mean that they are smart. Their work ethic is different. It was their work ethic and wanting to finish and having a purpose to do it*." David learned that those that generally did well, were willing to put in the extra work to create their success in college.

Keyshawn furthers the point by saying that he has been successful in school because he is "able to put in the work. The long nights, the all-nighters. Emailing and texting professors…If you are having problems, just don't let your pride get in the way, ask for help." Keyshawn goes on to say that it is all about "putting in that work and not take the easy way out." In his efforts to work hard, he attributes "being able to multi-task being a father, still being a full-time student and working, you know that's a key factor."

For Tyrone, hard work meant,

Taking more time out of class to learn on my own, instead of what the

professor and all the teachers tell me inside the classroom. Being able to

just be independent. Going to libraries to study on my own, going to get

tutoring if I need to. Just basically doing whatever I gotta do to keep them

grades up.

Given that Tyrone rebounded from earning a 0.7 grade point average

during his first semester of college, and currently carries a 2.5 cumulative grade

point average, his hard work definitely paid off, and moved him away from

academic suspension and probation.

Theme Four: Time Management

Participants of this study attributed academic success to the ability to

manage their time wisely. All four of the undergraduate participants of the study

highlighted time management as a skill that they needed as a part of their

academic success. During their college matriculation, all eight of the participants

indicated that he was involved in at least one extracurricular activity. Those

activities ranged from intramural sports, to fraternity membership, to holding jobs.

In participating in those activities, it was clearly imperative that they knew how to

balance their time between the classroom, and their campus lives. Table Three

gives a look at the types of activities in which each participant in this study

participated.

Table 3

On/Off Campus Activity Participation

Name	On-Campus Activities	Off-Campus Activities
Simon	STEM Scholars program, National Cyber League, Hackademics, and a lot of Diversity events	Part-time job, Volunteer with Scholars program mentoring and tutoring high school students, church
Tyrone	Black Student Alliance, Men in Action, Intramural basketball	Work with Scholars program during summer months
Chris	Intramural sports, game event planning for students called Midnight Madness	Work with Scholars program during summer months
Keyshawn	People of Color United, Men in Action and event planning for students to attend activities	Full time job, 40 hours per week
David	Residence Life as a Resident Assistant, Student Government Association as the Director of Community Outreach, Homecoming King, Vice President of Fraternity Chapter. Peer mentor coach in the office of Multicultural Engagement	Comedy, church
Gerald	President of Fraternity Chapter, Black Cultural Alliance, Multicultural mentorship program, Men in Action, and JacketLink	Fraternity pretty much encompassed everything—community service, partying, church

Morris	Sociology club, Psychology club and Criminal Justice Club. Intramural league, life guard for the recreation center for work study	Full time job, 40-50 hours per week
Terrell	Gospel choir, outreach organization called Night on the Town, Christian outreach organization called A New Life Productions	Part time job, 20-25 hours per week

Table 3

Chris worked hard to manage his time by not procrastinating. "I don't procrastinate because procrastination is a big thing. I seek help immediately before I get into any work. I had an Economics class that I wanted to prepare for, so I got a tutor on the first day that we had class." As Morris reflected on the management of his time while enrolled in school, he made the statement that,

When I was at school, I was either at work, visiting my mom or just on campus honestly. I felt like if I was away from campus too long, I might not make it back. I tried my hardest to just stay out the way and focus on school as much as I can.

Morris went further in sharing his personal experience when he said that he,

Tried to study at least twenty hours a week. But, it was hard because I was working like forty-five, fifty hours a week. Then, still having school. I played football for Baldwin Wallace my first year. Then, after that, my

mom was sick most of the time that I was in college. So, my income was

basically all that was sustaining her a place to live and me as well. So, my

time was spent working and school and trying to do activities when I can

on the weekends and during the day before I go to work or in-between

classes when something was going on.

Clearly, Morris had to use his time management skills, given that he worked so

many hours and had so much responsibility resting on his shoulders.

While several of the participants of this study held jobs off campus to

support themselves financially, they really had to manage their time wisely.

Terrell reflected that,

I worked all through college. The majority of the time in college I worked

at a grocery store part time. It wasn't too far from campus. I did have

support from my parents, but as far as major financial support, I really

didn't get that from them because of their own financial state. So, I had to

work throughout college, which was a good and bad thing. It made me

more independent, but dividing my time up between working and class, I

sometime found that a little bit hectic.

As David reflected on the things that he did with his time, and his study

skills, he indicated that as it related to studying,

That was probably the most hypocritical thing that I did.   As a peer mentor

coach, we would give seminars and lunch-and-learns on how to study, tips

on how long you should study for each class, but I wasn't studying. If it

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was chapters, just reading and retaining information, I was studying probably just nine or ten hours a week.

He further reflected that it seemed that he was "involved in everything except class." David felt that as a peer mentor coach on campus, he should have done a better job of incorporating the ideas that he was teaching his peers to improve their study skills. Additionally, he felt that the skills being taught to his peers were things that he should have been doing to improve his own academics. It must be noted that although David took seven years to complete his undergraduate degree, he persisted and finished. He developed some degree of time management to achieve his goal as he juggled his involvement in so many different activities and organizations during college.

Theme Five: Possess Drive, Grit and Determination to Complete Degree

Each participant in this study faced his own unique set of challenges as early as elementary and middle school. As a student selected to take part in the BW Scholars program, a young man that entered the program in the ninth grade exhibited specific risk factors. "The hand-picked participants, all incoming ninth-graders…were considered at risk for many reasons, including poor grades, spotty attendance, scrapes with the law and tough home lives"(Bernstein, 2011). In their process of graduating from high school, transitioning to college and graduating, or being on track to graduate, despite the aforementioned challenges, the participants of this study showed a great deal of drive, determination and grit. **"So, grit is not just having resilience in the face of failure,

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but also having deep commitments that you remain loyal to over many years"
(Perkins-Gough, 2013, p. 14). Grit is that thing that makes it possible for a
person to persevere and work toward achieving a set goal, regardless of the
obstacles and challenges that he faces. With the challenges beginning earlier on
in their academic career, the participants in this study displayed some grit by
completing high school. Out of the eight participants in this study, five of them
indicated that their academic success stemmed from their own desire and need
to complete school.

David attributes his academic success and college completion to "really,
just me wanting to do it and just the obligation to finish." It was his belief that
because he started college, he was not going to leave without finishing.
Likewise, Gerald stated that, "What pushed me, I've always been a strong willed
person. When I want to do something, I'mma do it. I set a goal and I try my best
to hit the mark."

Chris stated that he is successful in school because he is "just not giving
up." Keyshawn indicated that he attributes his academic success to his "attitude
of being persistent. If I don't get anything or am having trouble, I sit with one of
my professors to make sure that I have it down pat." Terrell elaborated by saying,

> I had a good friend support base, but college showed me that the
> responsibility of my success was on me. I didn't have the facilitators of the
> program or other teachers constantly telling me, 'Hey you need to study'
> or 'You really need to get this done.' In college, you really have to be

more self-sufficient. So, I think that from that and the examples of some of the professors that I dealt with, my success was really on me in college.

As Terrell made mention of the experiences that he had with some of his professors, he reflected on the challenges that he experienced in interacting with them.

I had an experience where I had a teacher that just didn't know how to help me. A lot of peers took statistics in high school, and they took economics in high school. When I was taking economics, I got to my mid-term and I was really just toughing it out. I would go to tutoring when I could, but I was just completely lost. Because I was a business major, I had to take economics. So, I was just completely lost. I got to my mid-term and I remember telling my professor, 'I just don't get it.'… My professor was just like, 'I don't know how to help you…It was in a sense, when you don't have a foundation for a subject, and you're at a collegiate level, you can't ask a person who teaches at the collegiate level to teach you the basics you should have learned in high school. So, not all of my classes, but a few of my classes, where when I went to advanced accounting or advanced economics, it was really like I had no ground to stand on. So, really I was just trying to make it through.

Despite the hardship encountered in some of his coursework, Terrell never gave up. He reflected on the fact that he may have earned a 'C' in some of those

courses, but he never lost focus on the goal of completing his degree. He went to tutoring, and got help when he was able.

Gerald also made mention of the fact that, in regards to graduating college, his mindset was,

I don't care what anybody else says, I am going to do this… Of course you are doing this as an individual, but then on the other hand, what else rides on your success? It's the sheer will that you have as a person. I don't give up. I hope that anybody that knows me says the same thing. I just don't give up. With that being said, I don't care if I fail eight classes, I'm going to take nine the next semester and try to do my best after that. I wouldn't let anybody tell me what I could or couldn't do.

Tyrone discussed the fact that he felt that there are "some professors who I feel judge me based off the way I look and you know they don't give me the grades that I feel like I deserve." When asked how he handled that, Tyrone says,

 I just take it on the head. You know, there is some part of me that's like 'You should go talk to that professor and see the reason behind receiving that grade.' But, then again, it's another part of me that's like 'Just forget it.' 'Cuz there are some things that I can't change, and I don't like to get involved with things that I can't control. If I can't control it, then I ain't worried about it. I'mma only focus on what I can control.

In considering the experiences of the participants of this study, there was a great deal of grit shown in their efforts to complete college. Having

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experienced significant challenges in high school, challenges in the classroom, and challenges in their personal lives, these young men possessed some determination within that propelled them to be able to complete their degrees, or remain on track to completion.

In response to research question two, what attitudes, skills and behaviors do academically successful African American male college students possess, five themes emerged from the data. The participants in this study indicated that they were receptive to the support of family, mentors and friends. Among those that were mentioned as being the strong sources of support were the participants' mothers, the program director, and other BW Scholars.   The second theme was that the participants in this study revealed that they were careful about the choices that they made in friends. They wanted to surround themselves with individuals that possessed similar goals and aspirations to their own. The third theme that emerged from this research question was that the participants of this study possessed a strong work ethic. Theme four for the participants of this study was that they relied heavily on their time management skills. They worked diligently to juggle their classroom assignments and their outside of the classroom commitments. The fifth and final theme was that the participants in this study possessed a drive and determination within themselves to achieve academic success. Grit was the characteristic that kept them focused on continuing in school to complete their degree or stay on track to complete it. The next section will explore the life experiences that have affected the lives of

academically successful African American male college student participants of this study.

Research Question Three: What life experiences have affected the lives of academically successful African American male college students?

In order to answer research question number three, the participants were asked to identify the life experiences that have contributed to their academic successes, discuss the academic challenges that they encountered, and describe how they overcame those challenges. The participants described their academic experiences when they first started college, whether they felt well prepared for college, their priorities outside of college, and whether they felt that their family was supportive of them earning their college degrees. In reviewing the responses, four categories or themes emerged as descriptors of the types of experiences that the academically successful African American male college student participants of this study experienced and had impact their lives. The life experiences included:

- Lack of academic preparation

- Benefits of the BW Scholars program

- Encouragement

- Changing life course for self and others

Theme One: Lack of Academic Preparation

All eight of the study participants echoed the fact that they felt unprepared academically for college. Simon reflected on his experiences in high school, and mentioned that there was

> A lot of stuff that I wasn't introduced to in high school. Going into computer science was foreign to me. I knew that I liked computers, but I didn't know what came with it. I was at a disadvantage because all of the students in my major came from their high school where they had computer science courses in the ninth grade. That definitely was a challenge for me, but it made me work twice as hard as they did. It helped me get a better end result.

Not only was there a lack of exposure and introduction to courses that Simon and the other participants would need in their major program of study for college, the participants described that they experienced a lack of opportunity to learn a college preparatory core curriculum in high school.

Chris explained that,

Oh, the first day I figured out that high school is completely different from college. When I came in, I sat in a college classroom, and like everybody was ready to learn. It's different from high school, [in high school], the class is fifty minutes, we'll be in there for forty minutes and we won't learn anything. We'll be in there talking and a lot of craziness will be going on. The last ten minutes, we start learning, or we get a worksheet. It's just like

over time, that ten minutes every day, every week, every semester, every year, it just builds up and makes it much harder for you to succeed in college.

David's experience throughout high school allowed him to gain perspectives on attending two different high schools within the same district. The first school that David attended was located on the east side of town and was primarily made up of African American students, with a racially mixed teaching staff. The school that David transferred to, was located on the west side of town and had a much more ethnically diverse student population, comprised of African American, Latino, Asian and white students. When David talked about his experience at the more diverse school on the west side of town, he recalled that,

> The curriculum was different. Still going to a Small Big City public school. My fellow Scholars, were still at the old school, and what I was doing at my new school was different. Our ninth graders were reading things that the students didn't even read in the twelfth grade at my old school. 'The Odyssey' by Homer, our ninth graders were reading that. So, from school to school, it was a different curriculum.

As David reflected on the old high school, where many of his BW Scholars peers graduated, the intensity of his words and the passion that he felt about the injustice of the disparity were obvious. He also noted differences in the level of parental involvement and strongly felt that he would have been much better prepared for college if he had attended the diverse school from ninth grade.

However, he acknowledged that he may not have been able to benefit from participating in the BW Scholars program.

> At the old school, I remember being in biology and we didn't dissect nothing. I got over there [to the new school], and we had a chemistry class and the burners were working. We actually did experiments. Over at the old school, the gas was cut off and the burners weren't working. It's like that at one of the new schools too. They have that nice new school and are not doing anything with it. We meet in the science room and the gas is cut off, and it's terrible because they are getting cheated. How do you expect them to know how to do a lab report when they come to college? They're getting robbed. How do you expect them to know what a graduated cylinder is, or the periodic table of elements, if they have never had anything outside of a worksheet and some classic matching up stuff. I don't want to be a part of that, man. I'm sorry.

David made this point to further illustrate why his passion and desire to become a K-12 educator diminished and turned him toward pursuing a career in higher education instead. He felt that he could not be part of an educational system that did not equitably educate students and prepare them for the world beyond high school.

In his current work as a program assistant at the university level, David supports students that are currently in the BW Scholars program. He tutors and

assists some of the current high school students with their homework and projects for school.   At the high school,

> This one kid in the program has an English 4 class and English is more my strong suit. The paper was to find fifteen errors in the paper and correct it. It was eighteen errors… The stuff that he was doing in there as an English 4 assignment was not an English 4 assignment, it should have been done in the second grade. It's going on and no-one is censoring the stuff and they're overlooking it.

This represents another example of students not being adequately prepared for college and beyond. The level of rigor and expectation in the assignment did not match the level of rigor and expectation necessary to adequately prepare students for college classes and their careers.

Part of the challenge faced by the K-12 public schools that the participants attended was the fact that there were not always qualified, certificated teachers in place to teach every course. Many of the courses at the high school that the majority of the participants attended were instructed by substitute teachers. Tyrone reflected on his high school experience by saying,

> So, we could go a whole school year with your homeroom teacher not even showing up. Then you go to the next period, this teacher ain't even showing up and then you got a sub. The sub really don't care, so… All the sub is doing is giving you a worksheet and you work on that worksheet and it's probably like definitions that you gotta look up in the book which is

like kindergarten work. And then for our papers, they was telling us to like write a poem, or you know, stuff like, 'Who is Santa to you?'

Morris shared that,

In high school, there were times where we had to share books, or we had outdated books. I remember in ninth grade, there were things that we were learning that were dealing with algebra. I look at my nephew in sixth grade and he's learning algebra concepts. So, just the big disconnect there, not having books for everyone, we had to leave the books here in school. We couldn't even take them home to study. When we did our homework, we did it from whatever we learned in class. We really didn't learn what we wanted to learn… In high school, it seemed like they were just going through the curriculum, saying, 'Hey I taught this. That's what it is.'

With the lack of a rigorous and challenging curriculum, adequate materials, and regular teachers, developing strong study skills was a challenge for the participants in this study. Gerald talked about the fact that he "really did not know how to study and was prideful…I don't think I could have survived a math class in college without constant tutors and people continually helping me to get better."

With all of the positive traits that the young men in this study possessed, it is interesting to note that fear of failure was part of their academic experience as well. Much of this fear of failure was a result of the lack of academic preparation

that they received in high school. In discussing some of the academic challenges that he encountered, Terrell had difficulty in his first mathematics class.

It wasn't so much that I didn't get it. It was that I didn't get it as fast as it was being taught. As my professor was teaching it, you get thoughts of not being good enough. You get thoughts of being frustrated and you feel like you can master it, but you just need a little more time. But, the extra time isn't there.

David discussed some of his fear as well. He stated that if he thought that he was going to fail a course, he would withdraw from it. "I ran away from math until my last year. It was so crazy. Man, it was fear of failing and disappointing myself or those who I am accountable to."

Gerald made mention of the comparison that he made between himself and the other students in his classes.

I could see when I got to college that my peers from other schools were on a different level. They would really read the 150 page reading assignments in one day. I would come to class maybe reading seventy-five and hurry up to skim the other seventy-five. I knew I wasn't on par with them.

Theme Two: Benefits of the BW Scholars Program

Even though the participants of this study endured many of the shortcomings that their high school programs offered, many of those shortcomings were overcome and addressed through their involvement in the BW Scholars program. The majority of the participants in this study mentioned that their involvement in the program is what led to their academic success. The program served as a buffer and helped fill in the curriculum gaps created by the unchallenging, non-college preparatory curriculum that the majority of the participants received in high school. Gerald reflected on the time when he first got to college by saying,

I felt that when I came to school I was okay because of the tutelage and preparation from the BW Scholars program. I don't want to sound like I am trying to make the program sound like the savior of academia. But, the reality is for me, it was. I can't speak on anyone else, but for me, without the program, honestly, I wouldn't have got a scholarship. I wouldn't have gone to BW and I wouldn't have graduated. I would have tried to focus on something like basketball. I was pretty decent at that, I thought that was what I wanted to do… But, the program changed my outlook.

Morris echoed a similar sentiment by saying,

I kind of had my foot in the door already because of the summer classes. They helped. I would say I wasn't completely ready for college. If I didn't

have those summer classes, then I probably wouldn't have made it through college. Being able to go out there and experience that, it helped a lot… Just coming out of high school, I wouldn't have been prepared at all. I would have flunked out.

Tyrone reflected on all that the Scholars program did for him, and how participating really benefitted him in building his academic endurance.

All of the summers out here at BW, in the summer, during the Scholars program. Just them long nights and classes, we would be in study tables, really like eleven to eleven. So, just them long hours of just focusing and going hard and trying to stay patient and being productive in just one day. So, it was just basically reflecting on everything that the Scholars program gave me. The opportunities that they presented me with, from even being in three hour long classes, with Dr. Little, who probably was one of the best math professors here at BW. So, just that tough learning, being in the class with actual professors who really cared… Because back at home we had pretty much substitutes all throughout the year, you know. We didn't even have math and reading every day.

Keyshawn attended two other universities prior to coming to Baldwin Wallace. He made the choice to transfer so that he could take advantage of all that the program offered. He was in good academic standing when he left each of the previous schools, but he wanted to transfer because of his affiliation with

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the program. By transferring to Baldwin Wallace, Keyshawn stated that it was an opportunity to continue,

> Doing things we did in high school, with the college credit, the community
> service, the leadership hours, just coming out here in the summer to take
> us away from our terrible neighborhoods. A lot of us, from that high
> school, didn't have the chances that we had during the summer to have a
> job working. Before the program, I never had a job. So, just being able to
> have a job and work and provide for myself was good. So, the BW
> program changed my life.

The Scholars had the opportunity to receive a free college education at Baldwin Wallace upon graduation from high school. Because the Scholars program offered such a unique opportunity to its participants, Terrell reflected on his parents' involvement in making sure that he fully participated in the program.

> With the Scholars program, they were like the drill sergeants. I really
> didn't get much leeway. Any event that the Scholars program had, my
> parents made me go! I was not like trying to be arrogant or anything, but I
> was like, I am one of the best students in the program, it's one event, they
> are not going to go crazy! They were like, 'Boy you gonna mess up your
> scholarship, you gotta go.' They saw the opportunity that it offered as far
> as going to college and they saw the rarity of the opportunity. So, they
> were like you have to see this all the way through. Whether it is the small
> community service events, or we're going to hear a speaker, or study

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tables, if it had the Scholars name on it, I had to go. I guess overall, I

appreciated it because they knew that it was all for my betterment in life.

There were no ifs-ands-or-buts about it.

Theme Three: Encouragement

As the participants had a variety of experiences in college and high school

that shaped them into the young men that they currently are, receiving

encouragement was a life experience that contributed to the academic success

of these African American male college students. Six of the eight participants in

this study commented that they found their family or people close to them to be

supportive of them earning a college degree and encouraging them.

Morris, who became financially responsible for himself in high school and

took care of his mother, reflected on his experience with his high school football

coaches.

> My coaches, when I played high school football, they used to always pull
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> me aside and tell me, 'I know you've got a lot going on, keep your head
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> up.' It's like the coaches just knew that I was going through. I see them
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> every now and again, and I always thank them every time that I see them.
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> I would say that those are the things that motivated me, keeping a roof
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> over my head throughout high school, being able to be promoted when I
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> was sixteen. For them to see that I had that potential, whether it was at
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> the restaurant where I worked, or anywhere else, helped me stay
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> motivated.

David reflected on the impact of knowing that people had confidence in him and his abilities by saying,

My success this far? I think it's just the way people are, the support that I got from people, the praise of different people. Sometimes, people use the drive of people telling them what they can't do as the reason why they do. It's like you'll never be this, you'll never be that, and that's not my story. I was always told that I was going to be something… I think with the praise and the belief in me, sometimes people see stuff in me that I can't see in myself. That still goes on today.

Terrell indicated that he received encouragement from the members of his church. As a high school student, and while in college, Terrell remained active in church. When he was asked about the experiences that contributed to his academic success, he said,

I feel like as far as church, the people that I interacted with always wanted the best for me… If you have to get up and give a speech in church, if you're not talking right or if you're not articulating, then someone will tell you that. It's not that church is the only place that will give you values, but church gives a lot of fundamental traits about life—being well spoken, being heard and reading correctly can come from that type of environment if you're participating and interacting with people there that care about your well-being.

In church, Terrell felt that he developed some of his skills through the encouragement of his church family that made him better and contributed to his success in college.

Some of the participants of this study found encouragement in the personal hardships that they faced. In some instances, they felt an obligation to use their hardships as a motivator and tool to propel them to rise above those challenges. Due to the fact that each of the participants in this study displayed certain risk factors at the time that they were in eighth grade, they were selected by their teachers and middle school administration to become part of the BW Scholars program. Those risk factors ranged from chronic absenteeism, to the incarceration of a parent, to a variety of challenges within their homes. Some of the challenges that the participants encountered are the very things that they indicated pushed them and helped them complete their degrees.

Simon, who was homeless after the death of his grandmother, credits some of his personal hardships, as contributors to his academic success. When Simon was asked about the experiences that contributed to his academic success, he responded,

I think that some of the situations that I went through as far as my transition from high school to college. I feel that it was special… Through the Scholars program in high school, they helped me understand what college was and how necessary it is in order to become a person to build the character that you need to survive in this society… The situations that

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I was placed in (death of grandmother, homelessness, lack of

transportation) played a big role in my success. I did not know if I would

make it to college or not considering the environment that I came from.

Even though it was not easy, and he often had thoughts of giving up, some of

those hardships encouraged Simon to press on and continue to complete his

college degree.

Chris experienced the challenge of being placed on academic suspension.

He recalled that he scheduled some of the most challenging courses during the

first semester of his freshman year.

I took Discrete math, and it has like an 80% fail rate. Everybody that

passed that class had pretty much took it twice. I had a bunch of hard

classes my freshman year. So, second semester, I got put on academic

suspension and went to Tri-C for two semesters and I really wanted to

come back to BW. So, I got there everyday, I worked real hard and I got

back in. Now, my grades are getting back to where they should be… I

would say that the semester that I was out at Tri-C pushed me and made

me push. I just worked a regular minimum wage job and I just thought to

myself, I worked this hard to get here and I felt like I deserve more, and I

felt like I just shouldn't give up.

It was through that hardship that Chris realized how much he desired to complete

his degree at BW.

The participants of this study found encouragement not only in the words and praise of others, but found encouragement in their need to break through the struggles that may have been encountered by them and their families.

Theme Four: Changing Life Course for Self and Others

Everyone in this study, except for Terrell, indicated that they were among the first in their family to attend college. With that being the reality, many of the participants of this study indicated that they felt an obligation to change the life course for their family. Because of their academic achievement of continuing through college or earning their college degree, many remarked that they now stand as a positive role model in their family. Tyrone shared that,

> Just being the simple fact that I'm the first in my family to graduate high school, the youngest out of eight kids, you know that really added a lot of fuel to the fire and motivated me to keep going, and to be the first child in my family to graduate COLLEGE, that will be huge! Because, it's like, settin' the standard for my family. So, I've got everybody who's comin' after me, like my nieces and nephews, they're talking about going to college now. So, it's like that's one of the main reasons that keeps me going everyday.

Tyrone is working to change the life course for his family. With four brothers that spent time in prison, he is illustrating to them and he rest of the family that academic success is possible. As Tyrone has worked to continue in college, and change the life course for his family, he also acknowledged the life

course paved for his college classmates. He reflected on his high school experience of getting searched by metal detectors each morning, seeing students bring guns and drugs to school, and fighting, and he felt that the situation was unfair. In contrast, many of the students with whom he attended college, had parents that Tyrone felt paved the way for them, and everything was put in place so that they could follow that path. However, Tyrone said, "For somebody like me, it's like I'm *CREATING* the path for my whole family."

David proudly remarked,

I want somebody to open doors for me and my nieces and nephews. Pretty much, anybody that comes from where I come from, I want to show them that it's another way to get out of your situation. We got this misconception, as black people, not always just black people, but anybody who comes from a lower income impoverished neighborhood that you gotta dribble or rap or run or play sports your way out of your situation. Why can't you think your way out of your situation? Or write a book out of your situation? Or draw or act out of your situation? Just showing them another way. Sometimes, I honestly think that if it wasn't for this program, or for me trying to break that generational curse, that nobody was in college or finishing college, that I probably would have did something else, probably entertainment or something like that. But, I had another option to go another route, so I took it.

Keyshawn discussed the impact of his college matriculation on his family.

My father taught me so much. He tells me how proud he is of me for doing this. He went back to school… He got his degree from Cleveland State. My sisters, they went Tri-C. My cousin never went. To me, to go off to school, it was very important. I got little cousins coming up and I'm telling them the importance of going to college. Nowadays, kids just go to school to play football. So, I'm just telling them to go with the one with the best education, because you never know what's going to happen. You might get hurt or anything like that. Or, if you do good, you might even go to the pros, but you need to have a back-up plan. It's good to have a degree. So, my family depends on me a lot. I mean, my little cousin told me that I was his role model.

In response to research question number three, what life experiences have affected the lives of academically successful African American male college students, four themes emerged from the data. The first theme indicated that one of the life experiences that the participants encountered was lack of academic preparation in high school. The high school curriculum offered to them did not present the level of challenge or rigor necessary for their college or career readiness. The second theme revealed that even though lack of academic rigor in high school was part of the reality for the participants of this study, they benefitted from being involved in the BW Scholars program. Overall, the participants believed that the summer enrichment courses offered on the Baldwin Wallace University campus served them well in making up for the academic content missed during the course of the school year. The third theme showed

that the participants of the study benefitted from the encouragement of others. Having others communicate their belief in them, and pushing them on to reach their potential were life experiences that had a positive impact on their academic success. The fourth theme that emerged from the responses of the participants was that they saw themselves as changing the life course for themselves and others. Given that every participant, except for Terrell, stood as the first member of his family to attend college, that achievement has encouraged other family members to put forth the same effort. The next section will discuss the implications for the instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students.

Research Question Four: What are the implications for the instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students?

In order to answer research question number four, the participants were asked to discuss steps that colleges and universities can take to best support them, the things that it is important for educators to do to support them in high school and college, and to talk about how public schools can better prepare their students for college. In reviewing the responses, three major themes emerged as qualities that are necessary for the instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students:

- Make African American males feel that they belong

- College community must demonstrate care for African American males

- Provide proper preparation

Theme One: Make African American Males Feel They Belong

According to the participants of this study, it is imperative that colleges and universities foster a sense of belonging amongst African American male students. Having come from predominantly African American high schools located in the inner-city of Cleveland, and transitioning to college, Tyrone states that,

> For me, it was always feeling a sense like I belong here. Don't count me out just based off where I come from. Don't count me out just based off of what you see on that paper. Don't count me out just based on the school system that I grew up in, you know 'cuz maybe that school system didn't teach me everything that I needed to know to prepare me for college. So, just don't count me out. Make us feel like we belong and that we can do this too. This ain't just a white, or Asian or black thing, this is for everybody, for all.

Acknowledge differences. All of the participants of this study attended high schools where the overwhelming majority of the student body was African American. Additionally, they grew up primarily in largely African American communities. In contrast, all of the participants for this study attended universities where the majority of the student body is white. Given that they came from schools and communities with a radically different set of demographics than their college setting, the participants unanimously felt that

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colleges and universities must acknowledge the differences that exist between their students. They overwhelmingly shared the idea that the schools that African American male college students attend must be mindful of the experiences that *all* students bring, not just the experiences of majority student groups. Chris talked about the fact that colleges need to "understand we come from a different environment and a different school system. It's not like the school system in Medina or anything like that. It's not to give us a handicap, but there has to be an understanding".

As part of that understanding, Gerald advised that colleges need to,

Know that there's a difference and make sure that you recognize the differences but accept the differences too. I think that the more that people accept the differences of individuals the more it enhances that place…. In a sense, I think that when these black faces go to these white universities or colleges, instead of accepting their differences, they just try to make them look like the rest of their students. In reality, that's just not truth. I really hate to say it, but we are behind the eight ball academically for whatever reason it is, regardless of the district, whatever the case may be, that's nationally. So, for me to come to your school and you treat me as if I should already know this, most times, I am not going to succeed. So, just recognizing me for my differences and helping me through them. And, I won't look like you in the end. I'm going to look like me.

David went on to express the idea that,

All of these colleges and universities talk so much about diversity, but they don't say anything about inclusion. They don't say nothing about how they are really working. They focus on numbers and sometimes color, but they aren't talking about how they are advocating for this group of black students and how we can bring them together, how we can have these different courses. Really just making us all feel included, let the staff reflect it, your programs and the things that you do reflect the students that you serve, especially African American students. They're the first to go… Just make them feel welcome.

From the participants' perspectives, a large component of fostering a sense of belonging for African American male college students is to acknowledge the differences that they bring to campus.

Activities. According to the participants of this study, an integral part of fostering the sense of belonging for African American male college students is communicated through the activities that are held on campus. Keyshawn shared that,

I think the biggest thing here at school, is that I feel like campus is so separated. Like, on the social level, you see on the weekends for example, you see all the other students that are not African American going to parties, but going to events as well. But, then, you see the African American students, asking each other, what is going on tonight, or the lack thereof… I just feel like there should be more activities for us.

David talked about his experience at Cleveland State University and shared that he and some friends started a student organization that focused on diversity because student life was not doing some of the things that he and his peers wanted to see. Student life,

> Would have programs on campus, but they would only cater to one type of people. You know what I'm saying? So, it kind of left everybody else out and it didn't feel comfortable going to the event, or they had to tolerate it. Yeah, you want this band, All American Rejects to come, but what about having them and a Kid Cudi or somebody that this group of people would like?

It was important to the participants of this study that the colleges and universities that they attended make them feel that they belong on campus. The participants of the study felt that the campus could foster a sense of belonging among African American male college students by hosting events on campus that appeal to them and reflect their culture. Additionally, the participants felt that it was important for the faculty and staff to acknowledge the differences that they bring to campus as African American men and use those differences to enhance the college community.

Theme Two: College Community Must Demonstrate Care for African American Males

The participants of this study overwhelmingly felt that instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students must

support them by showing that they care about them. When asked about some of the things that educators can do support African American males in high school, Tyrone was very transparent in saying,

> At thirteen and fourteen, those are the ages where, especially for our community, kids start engaging in sex, start getting involved with crime, drugs, guns, smoking weed and drinking alcohol. And, I feel like fourteen is the most critical age of adolescent life. Because yeah, fourteen was the most critical for me. It was either that I was going down that route with my brothers or I was going to college. The BW Scholars program helped me choose this route. In high school, it's that sense of support. When we go to school, it was all the Scholars that I had that even made me want to go to school. 'Cuz the wasn't teachers motivating us. We had teachers telling us, 'You ain't gonna be nothing. I'm just going to pass you through. Even though I know you don't know this subject, I know you're going to earn an 'F', but I'm still going to pass you through'. What type of teacher is that?

The type of promotion that Tyrone talked about-- promotion without ensuring that the students truly grasped that material, showed no level of care or commitment to the students. Furthermore, it crippled the students once they arrived on the college campus, particularly when the concepts built upon one another, and there was not foundational knowledge for the students to rely upon.

When he was asked the same question, Keyshawn's responded,

Care. I remember last semester, I went to a panel. It was some students from another high school in the Small Big City School District, and the biggest thing that all of the students mentioned was that they want the teachers to care. I guess now-a-days students don't feel like the teachers care about them. They feel like they are just there to get a paycheck and leave. Because I guarantee, if you have somebody care for you, telling what to do right and what not to do, you won't be seeing kids get suspended and get into fights. Like, we have our program director, who's really there for us—watching out for us, telling us the right things to do, and really care for us. We succeeded and are getting ready to graduate college.

In addition to the idea that many of the negative behaviors displayed by students are curbed when care is shown, there are some students that simply need extra motivation. Morris furthered Keyshawn's point by saying,

You don't really know what some of your students are coming to school with, what kind of baggage they're coming with, whatever is on their plate. Just because a kid is coming to school with a hoodie on, I was one of those guys-- having a hoodie on, with my hood up. Don't take them as someone that doesn't want to be here, or doesn't want to learn, or as someone that just wants to disrupt the class. Sometimes they need that extra motivation and to know that you believe in them.

The participants of this study communicated the idea that it is imperative for instructional programs that serve African American males to show some care as they strive to teach them the content. They felt that the educators must show enough care for their students by ensuring that they actually learn the content for the grades that were issued, seek to understand some of the circumstances in their lives and push them to make right choices.

Theme Three: Educators Must Provide Proper Preparation

The participants in this study revealed that the majority of them did not feel prepared for college. To that end, they stated that schools need to provide African American male college students with proper preparation. There are steps that high schools can take to improve the level of preparation for African American male college students' while the students are enrolled in high school. Additionally, there are steps that colleges and universities can take to prepare African American male college students once they arrive on the college campus. The following sections will explore measures that can be taken at the high school level and at the college level to provide proper preparation for African American male college students.

High School Preparation. The participants of this study unanimously believed that they were unprepared for college. Overall, they alleged that the summer enrichment component of the program was what assisted them in making it through college. Many of the experiences that the participants of this study had in high school did not serve them well in their preparation for college.

Among the practices highlighted in their high school experiences were not being taught material, lack of a rigorous or college preparatory curriculum, no application to real world experiences, lack of resources/materials, and lack of certified regular teachers. When he was asked about the things that educators can do to best support high school students, David responded, that the teachers need to "realize that they are trying to send people off to college." Although everyone is not going to attend college, David felt that high schools need to do their part to prepare the students academically if that is their choice to attend.

To further explain *how* educators can best prepare their students for college, David suggested,

> First off, I think challenge the students. I've seen that when you challenge students, most of them rise to the occasion, for real. When you challenge them, that's when they get it, but not when you toss them out there or just pass them along. Just challenge them, because all teachers went to college and they know what it takes to succeed in college.

David discussed the fact that although the program targets students that were in many ways, "written off", they progress and benefit from the challenge of the curriculum offered during the summer enrichment program. The students spend five weeks on the college campus during the summer and often learn more during the summer than they do during the eighteen week semester at their high school. Additionally, the BW Scholars program strives to provide the students

and the teachers with the resources that are necessary to be successful—books and materials for the classes.

Gerald talked about how the lack of challenge in high school ultimately hurts the students once they get to college.

> I guess people need to understand that easy gets the numbers up, but easy does not help the students. Easy is not good for students. I know people that leave out of high school with 3.5s and 3.7s and 3.8s. Then, they get to college and they are like, 'Why in the world?' It was easy for them. I would venture to say that it wasn't because they were so intellectually great or they were on another level, legitimately it was because it was easy and they weren't prepared! You can do this, that and the other, to get extra help. You can get in extra programs, but what is school for?

Gerald felt that there would be no need to participate in extra academic programs if schools adequately prepared their students. He credited the BW Scholars program for preparing him for college academically. Because of the program, he indicated that he had a better understanding of what he was getting himself into as he went to college.

Real Life Applications. Among the study participants, there was the belief that there has to be real life applications of the concepts being taught in high school. To make high school more engaging and more appealing, the participants found great value in having educators take the time to explain how

concepts being learned apply to the world around them and the significance of learning them. When he was asked about the things that public school educators can do to best prepare their students for college, Simon answered,

Integrate it with it reality. I know they have it tough, they have the behavior of the students to deal with. But, if they give some type of reality, they are not even talking about how to vote or taxes or a lot of the things you have to deal with after you graduate high school. If school is not letting you know, I don't know where you really supposed to learn all that stuff.

Terrell furthered Simon's point by saying,

I feel like a lot of times, especially with African American youth in general, we're told, you got to have this, but we're not told so much why! I feel like, yes in high school give me a real life situation.

Overall, the participants indicate that it is imperative that high schools provide a firm academic foundation so that once they get to college, African American male college students have a better chance of academic success. The firm academic foundation is characterized by challenge, access to curricular materials and applications to real-life situations.

Collegiate Preparation. After high school graduation, study participants described the steps that need to be taken once they arrive on the college campus to prepare them for the experience. There is a level of preparation and

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targeted intervention that the study participants suggest to improve the chances of success for African American male college students.

David explained that colleges and universities,

Could maybe specialize programs specifically targeted and put in place for students that maybe coming in that have overcome barriers…Maybe there could be an interview process with admissions and sit down and try to figure it out [specific needs of the students]. Had I had an admissions counselor to sit down and really get to know my family background dynamic, where I came from, and the school, I would have been placed in certain classes from the jump. Looking at me saying you should go this way, this would give me a better chance of succeeding.

In order to best support African American male college students, Terrell recommended that,

I guess they could try to reach out to more African American males when they recruit at different schools. Ask them what career goals are, and what are their aspirations and then catering what's offered at their school. Okay, you want to be an engineer, you want to be a lawyer, you want to be a business man, let them know we have this major or this program and we can help you and we can link you up with these types of businesses.

At the college level, the participants suggested that colleges and universities need to put procedures in place to pre-assess the needs of African American students. After having that knowledge, the participants felt that

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colleges and universities need to use the information gained to align needs with desired outcomes. Additionally, Terrell alluded to incorporating a mentorship component to facilitate the achievement of prospective student career goals.

Because all of the participants saw the Scholars program as a valuable resource and the means by which they were able to get to college and graduate, it is important to highlight the characteristics of the program that the study participants found to be the most valuable. The participants believed that they benefited most from the academic exposure to a college preparatory curriculum and challenge, the strong leadership in the program, and the support from other Scholars in the program and from the program director.

As a result of the participants' responses to research question number four, what are the implications for programs that are in place to serve African American male college students, three themes emerged. The participants in this study believed that it is important for colleges and universities to make African American males feel that they belong. The sense of belonging can be fostered through acknowledging the differences that they bring and by offering activities and events on campus that reflect African American culture and issues. The second theme revealed that students felt that the college/university community must show African American male college students care to better serve them. The participants of this study wanted professors and others in the college community to show genuine concern and interest in the things that are going on in their lives. The third theme that emerged was that the participants of this study believed that proper preparation at the high school and college level is imperative

to best serve them. In high school, the participants wanted a challenging

curriculum with real-life applications. In college, the participants wanted the

colleges to take time to find out about their needs upon acceptance, so that the

classes and programs offered by the school can be aligned to the unique needs

of the student.

Summary of Research Findings

Research Question One.   In defining what academic success meant to

the participants of this study, the data revealed that their perceptions of academic

success included having the ability to apply the things learned within the

classroom to the outside world. In higher education, there are several outcomes

that are indicative of academic success. Those outcomes include: student

retention, educational attainment, academic achievement, student advancement

and holistic development. In comparison to the ideas presented in the literature

that sought to define academic success, the application of concepts taught aligns

with the notion of intellectual development, which is a component of the holistic

development of college students.

Cuseo (2009) identified five characteristics of academic success among

students in higher education. He cited student retention, educational attainment,

academic achievement, personal development and student advancement as key

components of academic success. Of those characteristics outlined in Cuseo

(2009), the participants of this study also viewed academic success as college

completion and graduation. Because the participants continued to enroll in

courses and work toward the goal of degree completion, college graduation was a clear result of the persistence of the participants.

Lastly, having the ability to make proper use of provided resources to support their learning was cited as academic success by the participants in this study. In considering personal development, the goal is to develop holistically. Holistic development encompasses knowledge of self and knowing what one needs to achieve personal success.

Research Question Two. Research question two explored the attitudes, skills and behaviors that the study participants perceive academically successful African American male college students possess. According to the participants in this study, the data from this study revealed that African American male college students attributed their academic successes to the support of their families, mentors and friends. Family support was cited as a critical factor by the study participants in assisting African American male college students in overcoming some of the barriers that they experience in achieving academic success. Hrabowski, Maton & Greif (1998, 2006) indicated that strong family support is generally distinguished by the expectation of high academic achievement, positive male and racial identification, strong limit setting, and modeling how to deal with challenging situations as a person of color. While the majority of the participants of this study reflected on the support of their mother or other family members, their reflections about the support generally did not include all of the characteristics outlined by Hrabowski, Maton and Greif. The data indicated that the family support from the mothers of the participant came

more in the form of encouragement. Some of the participants noted that the type of support that their mothers offered was limited because they had not attended college themselves.

From the data in this study, the African American male college student participants shared the perceptions that they are successful in college because of the careful choices that they have made in their friendships. They selected to surround themselves with other young people who share similar goals. This finding was consistent with research conducted by Palmer and Gasman (2008), in which the researchers studied peer relationships and academic achievement among African American male college students. The study highlighted the fact that African American college students have the capacity to surround themselves with people that will positively impact their academic achievement. This same level of competence in choosing to associate with the "right people" was demonstrated by the participants of this study. The majority of the participants indicated that they had criteria, such as goals and aspirations similar to their own that they used to determine whether a peer was a suitable person with whom they would spend their time – a "right person".

Additionally, Harper's (2006) findings suggested that peers played a significant role in the successes of the African American male college students that he studied. In Harper's study, all of the participants "described how peer support significantly enhanced their experiences as achievers at predominantly White learning environments" (p. 347). The researcher's findings indicate that the participants found their relationships with African American peers to be the

most uplifting and supportive. Harper's finding was evidenced in this study. As the participants in this study talked about their fellow BW Scholars, there was a great deal of reflection on the level of closeness that they developed, the level of encouragement that they gave one another, and the desire that they had to see each other succeed. The participants also credited their strong work ethic and use of their time management skills as assets that supported them in their efforts to complete college.

Lastly, African American male college students attributed their academic successes to their sheer determination and their personal desires and needs to achieve. They focused on the goals they had set, regardless of the obstacles that they have faced. Garmezy and Rutter (1983) identified resilience as a skill in which people demonstrate the ability positively respond to stressful situations. The participants of this study demonstrated a high level of resilience. Morris graduated from college in four years, while working a full time job and being financially responsible for himself and his mother. David persevered and graduated from college after seven years. Simon buried his grandmother and became homeless as a result. He had his share of challenges in getting through college, but he pressed on and is a graduating senior. Tyrone and Chris began their college careers with extremely low grade point averages. They worked hard to get their grades back on track, and are now on track to graduate. Keyshawn understood that he was not being challenged enough in college, and moved to a new university so that he would be. Terrell and Gerald struggled with some of the coursework when they began their college studies. However, in the midst of

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all the struggles--the incarcerations of close family members, the struggles with classes, the impoverished neighborhoods, the poor academic preparation from high school, the lack of materials, the lack of certified teachers for every class in high school, they pressed forward! They continued in school in pursuit of their college degrees. Since they focused on an end goal and never let the obstacles and challenges get in the way, they not only showed resilience, but they showed grit as well. They showed grit because not only did they bounce back from challenges, but that they were focused on achieving their goal of completing their undergraduate degree, and made it happen.

Research Question Three. Lack of academic preparation is cited as one of the life experiences that were faced by the participants of this study. However, in spite of being ill-prepared academically, the participants unanimously indicated that they benefited from participating in the BW Scholars program. The National Black Male Achievement Study conducted by Harper (2005, 2006, 2012) sought to discover the factors to which African American male college students throughout the county attribute their academic success. He found that they attributed their success to:

- Consistently high expectations from parents and family members. In those expectations, college was always discussed as a non-negotiable

- An influential teacher that took the time to encourage them and push them to do their best.

- Access to a college preparatory program

- A peer mentor

- Opportunities to build relationships with other college-educated adults that could teach them a great deal about success in college and future career path.

The participants in this study benefited from participation in the BW Scholars program. Many of the success factors listed are qualities possessed by the BW Scholars program. While the high expectations from their families varied from student to student, the program director served as that influential teacher that took the time to encourage them and pushed them to do their best. Through the summer enrichment component of the program, the participants had access to a college preparatory program. They had peer mentors in the form of BW Scholars that came before them. Lastly, they had opportunities to build relationships with other college-educated adults, through the career preparation component of the program. The structure of the program aligns with many of the criteria that are outlined as contributing to the academic success of African American male college students. Lastly, the participants thrived on the encouragement and belief of others, and acknowledged that their college attendance and persistence was changing the life course for them and others in their family.

Research Question Four. Through the activities offered for them and by acknowledging their differences, the participants of this study believed that educational programs could help foster a sense of belonging among the African American male college students on campus. Harper (2013) cited five things that

student affairs administrators in higher education can do to improve success among African American male college students. One of those actions, according to Harper (2013), is recognize that all men are not the same, and all African American men are not the same, just as the participants of this study recommended. Generally, they wanted the college community to accept that they encountered different struggles and had different experiences in their quest to get to college. As a result of that, their needs are different. "Collecting and disaggregating various forms of data is an important way to avoid alienating some students and inadvertently confusing the needs of one racial or ethnic group with those of another"(Harper, 2013, p. 5). Some of the participants suggested that colleges take the time to find out about the backgrounds, challenges, strengths and goals of prospective African American male students to improve their chances for academic success.

Another implication for instructional programs that serve African American male college students is that they must provide proper preparation in high school and college, real world applications and proper resources. In order to determine what the proper resources are, Harper and Kuykendall (2012) suggested the use of eight standards that they developed as a guide for the implementation for African American male campus programs. In particular, two of the standards were key as they related to this study. Harper and Kuykendall (2012) recommended that with all of the programs that seek to serve African American male college students:

- the creation of the activities is guided by data,

- the college community collaborates with African American undergraduate men to create and put campus programs in place

With these two standards, instructional programs are called to value the voice of the African American male college students that they serve. By taking these actions, these instructional programs will automatically communicate a level of care about the success of their African American male college students!

Chapter V will summarize the study, and make recommendations to improve instructional programs that serve African American male students. The recommendations will focus on strategies that could be implemented at the high school and college level. Additionally, implications for practice will be provided, and suggestions for further research will be given.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In February, 2014 President Barack Obama announced his commitment to the "My Brother's Keeper" Initiative. He saw the need to "address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensure that all young people can reach their full potential."(whitehouse.gov) The President's vision was rooted in the idea that "my neighbor's child is my child – that each of us has an obligation to give every child the same chance this country gave so many of us." In creating this initiative, the President was "not creating a new federal program, but rather a call to action, and a targeted effort to convene leaders, identify effective strategies, and to work together to accomplish our shared goal of improving life outcomes for young people."(My Brother's Keeper Task Force, 2015).

As I think back on the conversation that I had with my professor about the African American young men at the school where I formerly served as the principal, it heightened the level of concern that I have about the success of African American males in schools. Since the K-12 education lays the foundation for any post-secondary opportunities, my concern about the recruitment and

retention of African American males in college intensified as well. I have a particular interest in finding ways to increase the numbers of inner-city African American male students that continue in college and complete their degree regardless of the challenges and obstacles that life has handed them. There is a great deal of research that speaks to the reasons why African American male college students are not successful in college, and why they do not graduate. It is for that reason I chose to research the factors that contribute to the academic success of successful African American male college students because there is little understanding of the essence of the factors to which they attribute their academic success.

Through literature review of this current study, it appeared that although African American male college students encounter a myriad of barriers that make it difficult for them to earn degrees, there are several factors that contribute to their academic success. I wanted to hear the stories of the participants of this study and have an opportunity to glean from them the things that contributed to the success of African American male college students. So, I conducted a qualitative study of African American male college students that have participated in the Baldwin Wallace (BW) Scholars program.

The BW scholars program began in 2003 as a collaboration between Baldwin-Wallace College, Cleveland Scholarships Program (now known as College Now Greater Cleveland) and the Big Small City School District. The program was initiated for a group of young men that were considered to be "at-risk", as they prepared to enter the ninth grade. The summer before they entered

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high school, they went to Baldwin Wallace University and began as BW Scholars. The three main components of the program provided the young men with academic enrichment, mentoring and leadership development and career preparation and internships.

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American male college students. Using a phenomenological approach to qualitative research, the study explored the attitudes, skills and behaviors of successful African American male college students.

The research questions that I developed in order to obtain an understanding of the factors to which African American male college students attribute their academic success were as follows:

1.   What does academic success mean to African American male college students?

2.   What attitudes, skills and behaviors do academically successful African American male college students possess?

3.   What life experiences have affected the lives of academically successful African American male college students?

4.   What are the implications for the instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students?

In order to gain insight into these questions, a purposeful selection process was employed to obtain participants for this study.   African American

male college students participating in this study completed at least three years of college and earned approximately a 2.0 minimum cumulative grade point average. Additionally, the participants met at least two of the following criteria:

- Lived in a high-poverty area

- Graduated from a Small Big City School District high school

- Grew up in a non-traditional family structure

- Non-college graduate parents

- Incarceration of a close family member

I conducted individual interviews with eight participants. Before conducting the research, a document outlining the intent of the study and sample interview questions were sent via email to the program director, who served as a gatekeeper (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). They are the individuals that have the ability to give researchers approval to conduct a study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), and they support researchers in connecting and developing trust with the participants of the study (Hatch, 2002). The program director, forwarded the email describing the study with sample questions to potential participants. We both felt that it would be beneficial for the initial introduction to the research study to come from a familiar name.

After that email was sent, the program director scheduled five interviews on my behalf. Those five interviews were conducted in one day. I was able to interview Simon, Tyrone, Chris, Keyshawn and David one after the other. After

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each interview, I took some personal notes that recorded my general impressions of the data provided in the interview, as well as a description of each participant. Those notes assisted me in writing the brief narratives about each participant's background story.   The interviews were audiotaped. I did not take notes during the actual interviews, as I wanted to be able to focus on exactly what each participant was saying. When I met with each of these young men, we met on their university campus in a conference room adjacent to the BW Scholars Program Director's office. The other three participants were interviewed off-campus, and were scheduled at different times according to their availability. Morris reached out to me via email so that we could schedule his interview. The program director gave me Terrell's telephone number, and we scheduled his interview via telephone. Lastly, I reached out to Gerald via Facebook. He responded immediately and we scheduled his interview. Gerald's interview took place in his office.

Once the interviews were completed, I began the process of transcribing them. After the interviews were transcribed, I emailed the transcripts back each participant to ensure that he believed that his responses properly represented what he said during the interview. Additionally, I asked any clarifying questions that I may have had.

In conducting this study, I was excited about the opportunity to give voice to the experiences of a group of African American male college students that experienced a level of academic success. It is imperative that their stories be heard, to inspire other programs. In turn, those other programs can learn from

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what the participants of this current study deem as factors that contributed to their academic success.

Summary of Themes

As a result of interviewing the participants of this study, the following list outlines the themes that emerged from their responses:

According to the participants of this study, academic success was defined as:

- Application of things learned
- Graduation
- Proper use of resources

Successful African American male college students:

- Are receptive to the support of family, mentors, and friends
- Are careful about choices in friends
- Have a strong work ethic
- Use their time management skills
- Possess drive, grit and determination to complete their degree

Some of the life experiences that have affected the lives of academically successful African American male college students include:

- Lack of academic preparation
- Benefits of the BW Scholars program
- Encouragement
- Changing life course for self and others

Instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students should:

- Make African American males feel that they belong

- College community must demonstrate care for African American males

- Provide preparation

According to the participants of this study, the data revealed that African American male college students defined academic success as college completion/graduation. They believed that because they were college graduates or on track to be college graduates, that was indicative of academic success. They also believed that having the ability to apply the things learned to different situations and making proper use of provided resources to support their learning demonstrated academic success.

The data also revealed that the African American male college student study participants attribute their academic success to the support of family, mentors and friends. According to this study, African American male college students were successful in college because of the careful choices that they made in their friendships. They chose to surround themselves with other young people who shared similar goals. The participants also credited their strong work ethic and use of their time management skills to complete college. Lastly, African American male college student study participants attributed their academic success to their sheer determination and their personal desire and need to achieve, focusing on the goal regardless of the obstacles that they have faced.

Lack of academic preparation in high school was cited as one of the life experiences that were faced by the participants of this study. In spite of being ill-prepared for college academically, the participants unanimously indicated that they benefitted from participating in the BW Scholars program. Additionally, they thrived on the encouragement and belief of others and acknowledged that their college attendance and persistence was changing the life course for them and others in their family.

The implications of these findings suggest that educational programs that serve African American male college students must develop a sense of belonging among them, care about them, and adequately prepare them for success in college settings by challenging them and providing proper resources.

Limitations

In terms of external validity, the phenomenological qualitative research of the voices and subjective truths of the eight African American male college students that participated in this study was not generalizable to all African American male college students. Given that the research was limited to African American male college students that had participated in the BW Scholars program, and who had all graduated from high schools within the same school urban district, this represents another limitation. The current study is limited in that African American male college students from a variety of high schools in high poverty, urban districts were not participants.

Because the results of the study relied upon the experiences of eight participants, it is difficult to say whether or not their experiences represent those of a typical African American male college student. However, their truths and experiences may be relatable to the experiences of many African American male college students.

Since the data collected hinged upon the shared experiences of the participants, the results were only as accurate as the level of truth provided in the responses. Qualitative studies are more likely to run a risk of misrepresentation of certain aspects of reality because of the differences between participants' and researchers' points of view, between lived and narrated lives, and between reality and representations of reality (Sandelowski, 2006).   Additionally, maintaining objectivity was challenging because of the researcher's familiarity with the schools, school district and some of the educators discussed by the participants.

Future Research

Research needs to continue in the quest to develop and refine structures that will best serve and support the success of African American male college students. To that end, a national study that researches the programs that have been put in place at colleges and universities nationwide to support the academic successes of African American male college students would offer some further insight. It would be beneficial to look at the components of the various programs and explore the effect that they have on the college graduation rate of African American male college students.

Considering that the participants spoke so highly of the BW Scholars program, it would be interesting to replicate the program in other large, high poverty cities, like Detroit, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Milwaukee, to compare the impact of a program of this nature in other locations. Similar to the BW Scholars Program, the replica programs could target African American boys who face significant challenges. The replica programs could offer the students the same academic enrichment component, leadership, community service and career preparation components as the BW Scholars program. Each replica program could be facilitated by a program director trained by the BW Scholars program director. The recommended study could explore the impact of the replica programs on college persistence, attitudes, skills and behaviors developed by the participants on an annual basis. Additionally, an eight year longitudinal study of the program participants could explore the impact of the replica programs on the students throughout high school and college in the various locations, researching college persistence, graduation rate and the factors to which the participants attribute their academic success.

Further research is also needed regarding grit and resilience. A research study focused on the impact of grit and resilience in the academic lives of African American male college students would provide wonderful insight. I recommend that the definition for this potential research remain consistent with the definition offered by Duckworth (2013, via Perkins-Gough), where she contends that there is a difference between the concept of grit and resilience even though the two terms are often used interchangeably. She defines resilience as having the

ability to bounce back after encountering difficult situations. However, grit encompasses not only the ability to bounce back, but also having a long-term focus on a goal despite any adversity. The potential study could focus on how the participants perceive resilience and grit, what they did to develop it and how they have demonstrated each in their lives.

As a graduate of a Historically Black College (HBCU), I am always interested in seeing how the experience of studying in that type of school environment impacts an HBCU student's perspective. I recall that on the first day of my enrollment at my beloved alma mater, the freshman class was addressed by the college president. In her remarks, she directed the class to stand. She told us to look to our left and our right, and remember the faces. She instructed us to do what we could to support one another in making it to our graduation day, four years later. In reflection, there was a mindset that was instilled in us, that motivated us to not necessarily compete with each other or measure our own success in comparison to someone else's. It was more of a mindset to compete against self, to be the best "you" possible. In contrast, when I attended a Big Ten University for graduate school, there seemed to be more competition among students, with no regard for supporting the efforts of others. To that end, I would be interested in seeing if there are differences in the meanings of academic success between African American male college students that attend historically black colleges and universities versus those that attend predominantly white colleges and universities. A qualitative study could be conducted that would use interviews to explore how African American males at historically black colleges

define academic success compared to those at non-historically black colleges and universities. It would be interesting to see if that mindset that was instilled in me and my classmates was consistently instilled at other historically black colleges and universities.

Another potential study could explore the impact of faculty and student relationships on academic achievement. As communicated by the participants, the BW Scholars program director had a profound effect on their education; she helped motivate them, counseled them, checked on them and cared about them. It would be interesting to explore the academic achievement of students with strong positive relationships with faculty members versus those with no positive relationships with faculty members. ACT Inc. (2010) conducted a national survey that sought to gain insight on strategies to retain students. The study found that professional mentoring programs increased the number of African American students retained in community colleges and universities. The ACT study also found that providing professional mentors to minority students boosted their social development and intention to continue beyond a two-year program. Wyatt (2009) found that professional mentoring programs that aim to support minority students, do improve their academic success and achievement among African American males and other minority groups. Additionally, the Wyatt study found that minority students that were involved in mentoring programs showed greater percentages of career placement than those who were not involved in mentoring programs. Additional research in this area could inform practice of college educators and motivate them to forge meaningful mentoring relationships with

African American male college students that could potentially support their academic success and help get them to college graduation.

I would also be interested in exploring the perceptions that high school educators have about African American male high school students, and the perceptions that college educators have about African American male college students. It would be fascinating to hear their voices and have them anonymously respond to online survey questions about how they perceive African American males in their classroom, and how they operate in the classroom as a result of those perceptions. Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges and Jennings (2010) studied teachers' and administrators perspectives on why African American male high school students were not academically successful. The study was comprised of teachers, administrators and counselors at a predominantly African American high school in a mostly African American county in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The researchers used focus groups, formal and informal interviews with teachers, counselors, and administrators and eighteen months of ethnographic observations. They found that the school's teachers, administrators and counselors primarily blamed the students, their families and the environment for the lower achievement of their African American male students. Given that those factors were outside of their control, the school maintained beliefs of defeat and had a bleak outlook on the capabilities of the students.

Hargreaves, Hester and Mellor (1975) studied the process by which teachers come to characterize some children. In doing so, they distinguished

between two types of rules within the classroom, where the teacher has to determine whether or not to get involved. One type of rule was the "moral" principle, rooted in the idea that rules teach children values. The second type of rule was the "pragmatic" principle, which regarded rules as a means of keeping order and upholding the authority of the teacher. The researchers discovered that the enforcement of the rules was dependent on the teacher's perception of the student. Additionally, behavior that was tolerated in some students might be punished in others. "Teacher perceptions of students are grounded in their own location in social categories of race, class, and gender. They make sense of their interactions with pupils and the conditions of their work from their social locations" (Ferguson, 2001, p. 89). Looking at how the race, class and gender of the teacher impacts their perception of African American male students at the high school and collegiate level could raise some awareness to shed light on how perception impacts expectations and the level of support provided to African American male students at all levels. It would be interesting to see if teachers at the high school and collegiate levels have similar practices in enforcement of classroom practices and expectations as those highlighted in the aforementioned research.

Implications for Practice

My purpose for conducting this study was to gain insight into the factors to which African American male college students attribute their academic success. It was my hope that the ideas and experiences that the participants of this study shared would inform the work of individuals in higher education as they seek to

better serve them and increase the number of African American men that obtain college degrees.

Because the focus of this study was to find out the factors to which African-American male college students attribute their success, the Anti-Deficit Framework was relied upon. Harper (2010) researched ways to attract more people of color into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields. "Instead of relying on existing theories and conceptual models to repeatedly examine deficits, researchers using this framework should deliberately attempt to discover how some students of color have managed to succeed" (Harper, 2010, p. 72). Although the anti-deficit framework was used in creating the majority of the interview questions for this study, I did find that some of the deficits that the young men entered college with became a point of discussion. As the participants talked about their high school experiences, I heard the phrases, "got robbed", "cheated", and "unprepared" to describe the workload set before them in their public high school. The major implication here is that our inner-city public schools cannot "dummy down" the curriculum.

The same high level of expectation and faith must be placed in the capabilities of our young African American men as middle class white students. Given the opportunity, they are able to shine and excel academically, but there has to be a firm academic foundation. The "opportunity gaps" that they experienced in contrast to their peers that had the opportunity to attend other schools should not exist. Regardless of school district, they all deserve the same opportunities for success. In his research, Pedro Noguera (2008) indicated that

he has visited "schools in suburban communities and private schools that serve affluent students and see quite clearly that poor children in the inner city are more likely to receive an education that places greater emphasis on order and control than academic rigor…I have also conducted research in schools that are racially and socioeconomically diverse and seen how a single school can provide affluent students with a quality education, while disproportionately punishing its poorer and needier students and providing them with an education that leads to nowhere" (Noguera, 2008, p. 127).

I considered the findings offered by Noguera (2008) in his research, and I reflected on the interviews with the participants of this study. I was reminded of Simon's sharing of the fact that,

A lot of stuff, I wasn't introduced to in high school. Going into computer science was foreign to me. I knew that I liked computers, but I didn't know what came with it. I was at a disadvantage because all of the students in my major came from their high school where they had computer science courses since ninth grade. That definitely was a challenge for me, but it made me work twice as hard as they did.

Expanding Simon's concerns about unpreparedness, Chris discussed the lack of rigor and parental involvement in his school,

Some of the students that I know, back at my high school, the level of work that they get in high school, is just like third grade. So, if you

take some of the work and the parents see… I am guessing that the parents really don't see the work that the students are doing. I believe if they saw that, they would take that into consideration and be more involved in the students' educational life, and say, 'You can't give my son this.'

In spite of low cognitive demand activities within their classrooms and lack of exposure to college preparatory curriculum and career focused courses, I thought about David sharing the fact that,

I've seen that when you challenge students, most of them rise to the occasion, for real. They know the stuff and get it eventually but haven't been challenged. When you challenge them, that's when they get it, but not when you toss them out there or just pass them along. Just challenge them, because all teachers went to college and they know what it takes to succeed in college.

In considering the statements made by the participants of the study, it is imperative that African American male students be given exposure to a college preparatory curriculum, to prime them for success in college. Their curriculum cannot be determined by the beliefs of their instructor or their poverty level. Denying them the opportunity to be exposed to a challenging curriculum makes them have to play catch up in college. Many schools shift the focus to maintaining order. Interestingly, in efforts to emphasize order and control as pointed out by Noguera (2008), African American male students are not being adequately prepared for college and career.

In his research about Black male success in higher education, Harper (2012) based his research on the analysis of essays written by African American male college juniors seeking to apply for doctoral degrees in education at the University of Pennsylvania. In reviewing the essays, Harper found that the participants "maintained a firm belief in the liberating potential of education" (Harper, 2012, p. 116). Likewise, in research conducted among northern California high school students, Noguera (2000) found that most Black high school students value education and would like to succeed in school. The high value that African American male students often place on education is often not met with a high expectation of them excelling in school. The process of dummying down the curriculum perpetuates a cycle of lack of education, lack of exposure and lack of opportunity.

During his interview, I remember Terrell saying that the young men in the BW Scholars program with him had this saying, "There are no thugs in college." All of the African American male college students that he knew had worked hard to get there, and had no aspirations of using their degree to cultivate a thug life or a thug mentality. I reflected on Tyrone's comments about the teachers that he had, that just passed him along, and told him that he would never be anything. In thinking about that, my heart sank. Looking at Tyrone, he truly looked like he could be my child. Physically, he reminded me of some of my family members. Also, he stood as a representation of all of the African American young men throughout the school district that teachers were college educated to teach, challenge and inspire.

In my estimation, the overall experience that the participants of this current study endured in high school communicated little belief in their ability to accomplish great things and treated them like they would *be* nothing but common thugs.   Individuals that work in education and have the gall to tell another person's child that they are simply being passed along with no real chance of academic success, rob children of their fundamental right to a free and appropriate education. They are the true thugs.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the phenomenon of African American male college students in this study are the following recommendations to prospective African American male college students, high school programs serving African American males and higher education faculty and staff.

The combination of exposure to challenging curriculum, career focused courses and real-world of work education can only contribute to the development of academically successful African American young men. It is imperative that African American male students have access to college preparatory coursework and classes that will expose them to fields for potential future careers.

High School Level Recommendations

At the high school level, the participants talked about the need to be taught a curriculum that is challenging, prepared them for college, and made real-world applications. The participants of this study indicated that instructional programs must provide real-world experiences in teaching African American

male college students. Certainly, there are challenges that come with working as an educator in an inner city, high poverty school district. However, genuine care and concern about the students must be shown on a consistent basis, coupled with creative lesson planning that incorporates real world experiences and differentiation. Genuine care and concern is shown for students when time is taken to get to know them, build relationships with them, and gain an understanding of their areas of strength. "If we do not have some knowledge of children's lives outside of the realms of paper-and-pencil work, and even outside of their classrooms, then we cannot know their strengths. Not knowing students' strengths leads to our "teaching down" to children from communities that are culturally different from that of the teachers in the school"(Delpit, 2006, p.173).

Creative lesson planning that incorporates real world experiences will support the academic success of African American male students. Kunjufu (2013) recommended that schools do all that they can to develop a leadership culture among African American males. He wrote that "many schools have created a military-style culture.   They feel the best way to teach a Black male is to break him down. There is nothing worse than to see a Black boy whose spirit has been broken" (Kunjufu, 2013, p. 143). He recommended several strategies that schools could implement to develop a culture of leadership among African American male students.

Among those strategies, Kunjufu (2013) recommends that African American male students be taught the importance of community service. He argued that "one of the best ways to help students appreciate their education is

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when their education improves the quality of life in their neighborhood" (Kunjufu, 2013, p. 143). In essence, when African American male students use their efforts to make an impact in their community, their service is helping them to develop leadership within their community. The benefits of this strategy are two-fold: the strategy would work to develop leaders *and* strengthen the impact of the school in the community.

Kunjufu (2013) also recommends that the students engage in several focused activities to help them develop as leaders. He suggests that the students participate in a time exercise, a friends exercise, an attitude exercise, a power of words exercise, a goals exercise, a values exercise and a choice and consequences exercise. Each exercise would push the students to do some self-assessment and really consider how they are spending their time, assess their friendships, check their attitudes, understand the weight that their words carry and develop five and ten year plans. He asserts that engaging in these self-assessment activities, helps develop successful African American male students. Allowing the students the opportunity to look at themselves in these activities, communicates a level of care and concern for their well-being and self-improvement.

Payne and Slocumb (2011) recommend strategies that are believed to support boys in staying engaged in school and assist them in getting to college. Payne and Slocumb (2011) suggest that male students need to be provided with:

- "Affirmative language that helps them envision what they could be. For example, 'You are so good at arguing, you would make a great

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attorney.' 'With a smile like that, you should be a dentist'" (Payne & Slocumb, 2011, p. 90)

- Coordinated visits to colleges and technical schools, because it is beneficial for them to see college students that look like them.

- Discussions about career choices

- Continuous emphasis on academics. Schools could identify homerooms as colleges, and have regular discussions about college related issues built into the curriculum.

- Assist them in identifying mentors within the career field that they are interested

In addition to a challenging curriculum that prepares African American males for college and beyond, their school experience must provide them with real-world experiences as well. In his description of a program intended to prepare boys for work, Canada (1998) wrote,

We find that we must train teenagers right from the beginning that a job carries with it a set of expectations that the young person might not understand or even agree with. There are the usual things that most employers expect from their employees—punctuality, good attendance, reliability. But then there are other things that we must instruct young people in—professional appearance, having a good attitude, respect for authority. Probably the most difficult thing our

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young people have to learn to cope with is how to do a good job even

when you don't like doing something. (p.111)

Instructional programs that serve African American male high school

students must provide challenge with a college preparatory curriculum and

an unwavering belief in their ability to succeed academically.   Real world

connections must be made to show students "the why" behind the concepts

that they are learning.

Collegiate Level Recommendations

The participants of this study indicated that instructional programs that are

in place to serve African American male students on the collegiate level need to

make African American males feel that they belong.   In their review of fifteen

years worth of efforts to support African American males in higher education from

1997-2012, Harper (2014) found that the "homogenization of Black males was

evident in the substance of campus initiatives" (Harper, 2014, p.129). Yet, Harper

and Nichols (2008) found a great deal of in-group diversity among the African

American undergraduate men in their study. Although the study had participants

that were all men of color, they found vast differences in socioeconomic status,

differences in geographic origins, campus and community affiliations, and sexual

orientation. Colleges and universities must recognize these differences exist

among African American males and consider them as they seek to develop

programs on campus to serve them.

The participants of this study also indicated that the college community must demonstrate care for American males, and that high school and college educators must provide proper preparation. Once the students get to college, the participants believed that there were steps that the school could take to keep them there. David recommended that,

> Maybe there could be an interview process with admissions and sit down and try to figure it out [specific needs of the students]. Had I had an admissions counselor to sit down and really get to know my family background dynamic, where I came from, and the school, I would have been placed in certain classes from the jump.

David felt that if colleges took the time to get this type of information on an individual level, it would be a step in ensuring better academic success for African American male college students. To that end, the intrusive advising model needs to be implemented as a means to support the academic success of African American male college students.

The intrusive advising model is centered on the idea that some students will not take the initiative in resolving their academic concerns. To support them in that effort, the students need the intrusive assistance of assigned advisors. Earl (1987) coined the use of the word "intrusive," to describe this model of advising as "action oriented by involving and motivating students to seek help when needed". "It is a process of identifying students at crisis points and giving them the message, 'You have this problem, here is a help-service.'" (Earl, 1987). The intrusive model is proactive and seeks to address problems as they arise,

rather than being reactive.   In essence, advisors stay connected with their

students, instead of waiting for students to come to them for help. The intrusive

advising model parallels the work of the program director in this current study.

Academic advisors similar to the role that the program director played for the BW

Scholars could serve African American male college students, using an intrusive

advising model as an approach to support their academic success.

Additionally, the participants of this study felt that the college community

must demonstrate care for African American males. Considering that the

participants of this study indicated that they were underprepared for college, they

must overcome that reality once they get to college. Had it not been for the

academic enrichment component of the BW Scholars program, many of the

participants shared that they would have been lost in college. According to

McGIllin (2003), academic advisors provide the foundation for the success of

students that are not academically prepared and "play a pivotal role in promoting

resilience"(McGillin, p. 48) Additionally, the academic advisor provides a one-to-

one touch with each student and should reflect care and interest in the student's

general success in college. As part of the intrusive advising model, it would be

beneficial to the academic success of African American male college students, to

assist the young men in their academics.

Not only should colleges and universities seek to help African American

college students in developing academically, there must be efforts to aid the

students in developing their resilience and grit. Tinto (2004) upheld the notion

that colleges and universities have the capacity to support the development of

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resilient students. By doing so, they improve retention and graduation rates,

when they provide strong academic advising. He saw advising as a major

component of the academic, social, and personal support programs necessary to

help students meet their learning needs. Additionally, McGillin (2003) indicated

that no matter the challenges a student faces, student resilience is the best

indicator of success. In essence, strong advising can provide academic support,

and help students develop resilience as well.

Harper and Kuykendall (2012) developed eight standards to use as a

guide for the implementation of African American male campus initiatives. The

standards have been adopted at seventeen colleges and universities in the state

of Arkansas, North Carolina Central University, UCLA, the Community College of

Philadelphia, Stanford University and the University of Wisconsin, Madison. The

standards recommend that with all initiatives that seek to serve African American

male college students:

a.) the creation of activities is guided by the use of data;

b.) the college community collaborates with African American

undergraduate men to create and put campus programs in place;

c.) initiatives are guided by a written plan created jointly by a variety of

stakeholders. Potential stakeholders may include teachers, campus

administrative staff, student leaders on campus, neighborhood/community

leaders, student advisory panel, and prospective students;

d.) learning, academic achievement, student development and improved degree completion is priority over social programming;

e.) programs are grounded in published research;

f.) insights from high achieving African American male students are considered;

g.) honest conversations about racism and their harmful effects on Black male student outcomes are had;

h.) all levels of the college community are held accountable for improving Black male student retention, academic success, engagement, and graduation rates.

It is recommended that the African American male initiative standards developed by Harper and Kuykendall (2012) be used as a guide for the development and implementation of programs that seek to serve African American male college students. Not only should the input of high performing males that are already on campus be considered, but incoming freshmen should be relied upon for input as well. Allowing for the creation of African American male initiatives could allow a safe space on campus for the men, allow their voices to be heard, and foster the sense of belonging that many of the study participants indicated was missing. Additionally, creating African American male initiatives can serve as a means to replicate some aspects of the cohort model within the BW Scholars program. The cohort of students was one of the

characteristics that the participants saw as very beneficial, as they did everything together and became "like family."

It was important for the participants of this current study to have their college make them feel that they belong, for educators to provide proper preparation, and show them that they are cared about within the college community. The aforementioned recommendations strive to address those desires.

Conclusion

As a result of this study, the experiences of eight African American men that participated in the BW Scholars program in high school, went to college, and remained for at least three years were explored. Each participant had a story. Simon's story was humbling. The fact that he became homeless right before he started college, refused to depend on his sister to take care of him, supported himself throughout college, and never gave up, is a testament to the idea that persistence, determination and hard work make the difference.

Tyrone witnessed the incarceration of all of his brothers when he entered high school, experienced a tough first semester of college, earned a 0.7 grade point average, but studied hard, stayed focused, and got his grades back on track. Tyrone focused on creating another life course for his family.

Similarly, Chris was placed on academic suspension and was forced to attend a local community college. He studied, focused, and made sure that he was able to return to Baldwin Wallace to complete his studies.

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Keyshawn realized that he was not experiencing the correct level of challenge and transferred schools twice before arriving at Baldwin Wallace. He worked a full time job, had a full time course schedule at school, and became a father. Yet, he was still able to complete his undergraduate degree in four years.

Morris worked a full time job since the age of fourteen, and throughout college. His earnings provided for two households, his and that of his mother back home after she suffered a work-related injury.

Terrell and Gerald struggled with some of their coursework when they began their college studies. They remained in school, and did not allow the difficulty in those courses to deter them from earning their college degrees.

In the midst of all the struggles--the incarcerations of close family members, the struggles with classes, the impoverished neighborhoods, the poor academic preparation from high school, the lack of materials, the lack of certified teachers for every class in high school, the participants in this study pressed forward! Their resilience and grit propelled them to be able to continue in school in pursuit of their college degrees. Despite it all, they were each able to provide insight into the meaning of academic success, the attitudes, skills and behaviors possessed by those that are academically successful, share their life experiences, and discuss the implications for other instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students. They showed that they were focused on achieving their goal of completing their undergraduate degree, despite the challenges that they faced. Each of these amazing, dedicated, and talented young men is an inspiration for us all. It is my hope that

their stories shed light on how the nation can work to better support African American male college students and develop structures that will set them up for academic success. Are the BW Scholars their brother's keeper? From much of what they shared in their reflections during this study, "Yes, they are".

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APPENDICES

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Questions	Where are you from? What high school did you attend? How old are you? What is your career goal? What is your grade point average? Discuss your family structure. What is your major or program of study? What year of study are you currently in?
Research Question 1. *What does academic success mean to African American male college students?*	What does academic success mean to you? Do you believe that you have achieved academic success? Explain.
Research Question 2. What attitudes, skills and behaviors do academically successful African American male college students possess?	Why are you successful in school? To what do you attribute your success? Do you have friends that are academically successful? Why are they or why are they not? What types of activities do you participate in on campus? What types of activities do you participate in outside of school? How many hours per week do you spend studying? Describe your role and activity in class. How would you compare your college friends versus your friends outside of college? How would you describe your interaction with your college instructors? How do your college instructors support your achievement? How do you interact socially on campus? Who or what plays an important role in your life that contributes to your educational goals?
Research Question 3. What life experiences have affected the lives of academically successful African American male college students?	Identify what experiences contributed to your academic success. What type of academic challenges have you experienced? How did you overcome them? How would you describe your academic experiences when you first started college? Were you well prepared to enter college? Explain. What are your priorities outside of your education?

	How encouraging is your family of you getting a college degree?
Research Question 4. What are the implications for the instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students?	What can colleges and universities do to best support you? What do you think is important for educators to do to support you in high school? In college? What can public schools do to better prepare their students for college?

Cleveland State University

College of Education and Human Services

Department of Doctoral Studies

Dear Baldwin Wallace Scholar,

My name is Yvette Brown, and in addition to serving as a principal in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, I am a Doctoral Candidate at Cleveland State University. As part of this program, I will be conducting a research study to learn more about African American male college students and graduates. I will be working specifically with BW Scholars that are currently in college and those that have graduated. I would like to invite you to be a part of this study. Below is some information to help you make an informed decision:

Why I am conducting this study: There is a great deal of research that outlines the challenges and problems that exist for African American males in college attendance and completion. I want to learn more about the factors that contribute to the academic success of successful African American male college students. This study will explore the meaning of academic success for African American male college students that have participated in the program, and find out what attitudes, skills and behaviors that academically successful African American male college students possess. Ultimately, the aim is to gain insight into these areas to determine the implication for instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students, so that those successes can be replicated.

What will happen if you participate in the study? If you participate in this study, I will ask you to meet with me for an hour-long interview to talk about your experiences as an African American male college student and participant in the BW Scholars program. Your interview will be transcribed, and you will be given a transcript of your interview. You will be asked to read through your interview transcript for accuracy. Finally, you may be asked to participate in a 15 minute follow up interview as well.

Are there any benefits or drawbacks of being involved? This study will allow you to reflect on your own experiences and inform educational practice to help

benefit more African American male college students in their efforts of attaining a college degree.

<u>Do you have to be in the study?</u> No, you do not. There is no reward for participating or penalty for non-participation. You can change your mind, if you later decide that you do not want to be in the study anymore.

You can ask questions at any time.

My telephone and e-mail are:

PH: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮   **E-mail:** ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

In you have concerns about this research, you can also contact my advisor, Dr. Frederick Hampton.

PH: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮   **E-mail:** ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

To go ahead with this study, I need to know that you are willing to participate and that your choice to do so is entirely voluntary. Please review your rights at the bottom of this page and sign below if you agree to participate.

Sincerely,

Yvette Daugherty-Brown

IF YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY, PLEASE SIGN YOUR NAME BELOW

Signature of the Participant _____Date _____

Signature of the Researcher _____ Date_____

As a research subject, you have the following rights:

1) To be told what area, subject, or issue is being studied.

2) To be told what will happen to you and what the procedures are.

3) To be told about the potential risks or discomforts, if any, of the research.

4) To be told if you can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefit might be.

5) To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study, both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

6) To refuse to participate in the study or to stop participating after the study starts.

7) To be free of pressure when considering whether you wish to be in the study.

Cleveland State University

College of Education and Human Services
Department of Doctoral Studies

An Exploration of African American Male College Students' Perceptions of the Factors that Contribute to Their Academic Success

Dear Participant,

We are Dr. Frederick Hampton and Yvette Daugherty-Brown, faculty member and doctoral candidate, respectively, in the Department of Education, at Cleveland State University. We are asking you to participate in a study being conducted with individuals that have participated in the Baldwin Wallace BW Scholars Program. The purpose of the study is to gain insight into the factors that have contributed to the academic success of African American male college students that have participated in the BW Scholars Program. This study will explore the meaning of academic success for African American male college students and find out the attitudes, skills and behaviors that academically successful African American male college students possess. The study will also explore the life experiences that have affected the lives of academically successful African American male college students. Ultimately, the aim is to gain insight into these areas to determine the implications for instructional programs that are in place to serve African American male college students, so that those successes can be refined and replicated.

You are being asked to participate in an individual interview that will be about one hour in length. Your responses will be audiotaped and transcribed. A transcript of your interview will be sent to you to ensure proper representation, and you will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview to ask any clarifying questions. Your responses during the interviews will be treated in a confidential manner. Your name and other identifying information will not be linked to the data collected, and you will select a pseudonym to ensure privacy. With a target of eight to ten participants for this study, breach of confidentiality is a possibility as those familiar with the program may be able to determine who responded to some questions based upon answers given.   Even with that potential, note that participation in this study will allow you to reflect on your own experiences and inform educational practice to help benefit more African American male college students in their efforts of attaining a college degree.

Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. There is no reward for participating or consequence for not participating. Any risks associated with this research do not exceed those of daily living. The interview should take approximately one hour to complete and

will take place in a location convenient to you. The follow-up interview should take no longer than 15 minutes.

For further information regarding this research, please contact Dr. Frederick Hampton at ███████████, email ███████████████████; or Yvette Daugherty-Brown at ███████████, email: ███████████████████.
If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at ███████████

There are two copies of this letter. After signing them, keep one copy for your records and return the other one. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

Please indicate your agreement to participate by signing below.

"I am 18 years or older and have read and understood this consent form and agree to participate".

Signature _____

Name _____
(please print)

Date _____