THROUGH THE EYES OF SUCCESSFUL BLACK MALES

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Now, onto the next chapter…
Abstract

Academic achievement for Black males in the United States is in a state of educational crisis. Black males have low high school graduation rates, low college enrollment, low college completion rates, and higher likelihood to leave college before degree completion. Institutional racism – including low teacher expectations, stereotyping, media portrayals, self-perception and acceptance, microaggressions as well as Black males’ social identity – contribute to Black males’ level of academic success. If institutional racism and social identity are factors inhibiting academic achievement for Black males, then diminishing the negative effect of these two factors might significantly propel Black males into academic success. Additional research that explores the experiences of and factors leading toward Black males’ academic success can inform and develop additional academic supports for this population. Using social identity theory as a framework and analyzing data using critical race theory, this study sought to answer the following research questions: 1.) How do Black males who have achieved academic success throughout their educational careers make sense of their experiences overcoming institutionalized racism? 2.) How do the social identities of Black males influence their behaviors, perceptions and attitudes towards academic achievement? Findings from this study showed that Black males’ knowledge of self and knowledge of their history help them to succeed. Self-advocacy is a necessary skill for overcoming the various complexities of racism, White Privilege is not just for Whites, and Vision creates reality. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Black Males, Institutional Racism, Social Identity Theory, Self-Advocacy, White Privilege, 5% Nation of Islam
Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

You now hail from a lineage and legacy of immeasurably strong men -- men who bore
tremendous burdens and still laid the stones for the path on which we now walk. You wear the
mantle of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington, and Ralph Bunche and Langston
Hughes, and George Washington Carver and Ralph Abernathy and Thurgood Marshall, and,
yes, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These men were many things to many people. And they knew
full well the role that racism played in their lives. But when it came to their own
accomplishments and sense of purpose, they had no time for excuses.

President Barak Obama, Commencement Address at Morehouse College.
Atlanta, GA May 19 2013

Today, over 19 million students are enrolled in more than 4,200 colleges and universities
across the United States; two million of these students are Black. Although the specific number
of Black males is not available, the number of Black males in higher education has increased.
Juxtaposed with the increased number of males is the Black male rate of college-level attrition.
Black males have the highest rate of college level attrition amongst all races; 1/3 of Black males
entering college will complete within six years (Cummins & Griffin, 2012; Strayhorn, 2013).
Traditionally, researchers compare the achievement of Black to that of Whites, this establishes
what is known as the achievement gap (cf. Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Jencks & Phillips, 1998;
Singham, 1998). For the purposes of this doctoral thesis, the researcher views all Black males as
likely to succeed. Academic success, in this doctoral thesis, is defined as college persistence and
completion with a grade point average of 2.75 or higher. Therefore, the traditional comparison of
Blacks’ success to Whites’ is aligned with the deficit view of Black male success. Black male success is framed from a deficit viewpoint. The researcher offers examples of this viewpoint to familiarize the reader with how institutional racism presents itself in academic settings, to give Black males insight into how they are perceived through policy and academic measure, and to highlight the difference between deficit and anti-deficit views.

We must address with urgency the complex crisis of Black males’ underachievement in education overall as well as specific points along the educational pathway such as Black males entering college and Black males completing college (Harper, 2013). In secondary education, for example, more than half (52%) of Black males starting ninth grade in the 2006-2007 school year graduated in four years. In comparison, seventy-eight percent of White males starting ninth grade in the 2006-2007 graduated in four years (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). These Black-White graduation disparities are fueled by grade-level retention, alternative school placements, and disproportionate numbers of school suspensions (Walker, 2012).

If we want to know how Black males in America have become academically successful, then researchers need to ask academically successful Black males. Very rarely are the faces of Black male college graduates displayed in social media, television, and movies. For example, despite Black males being prominent in science, images of successful Black male college graduates are often limited to February-Black History month. The prominence of successful Black men depicted as athletes, musicians, and actors often overshadows the academic degrees they earned. Not every Black male has the skill, talent, and fortitude to be a successful athlete or entertainer. For many Black males, academic success will buttress them from a life of poverty. Similar to the comparison of Black and White achievement, the body of research presented in this doctoral thesis does not intend to create an additional false dichotomy of “Black male
athlete” and “Black male academic.” In contrast, the focus of this doctoral thesis is to give voice to the academic and social achievements of Black males that might exist alongside athletic and extracurricular success. Black male college graduates’ experiences and how they make sense of those experiences can help other Black males who are preparing to venture the college road that is less traveled by this population.

**Research Problem**

Academic achievement for Black males in the United States is, as Whiting (2006) pointedly writes, in a state of educational crisis. Gilman Whiting, Professor of African American and Diaspora Studies, writes extensively about Black achievement in academic settings. As a result of his years of research, he asserts that Black males are in a state of educational crisis that is comprised of Black males’ low high school graduation rates, low college enrollment, low college completion rates, and higher likelihood to leave college before degree completion (Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008a; Whiting, 2006, 2009). Moreover Whiting, along with other researchers, highlight organizational patterns of institutional racism – including low teacher expectations, stereotyping, media portrayals, self-perception and acceptance, microaggression as well as Black males’ social identity – contribute to their level of academic success (Cummins & Griffin 2012; Whiting 2006). One example of the organizational patterns that signify institutional racism is the stereotype made about Black males that often inhibit educators from discerning their academic strengths (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Frazier Trotman, 2002; Grantham, 1998; Steele, 2003). Another example is Cross and Vandiver’s theory (2001) of racial identity which notes the detrimental effects of racial discrimination on Black males. In Cross and Vandiver’s view when Black males receive microaggressive messages including being less competent or capable than men of other races, Black males begin to question their own academic potential and reject their
own cultural backgrounds. Black males’ self-perception along with the deficit thinking of many educators can be deleterious and impede Black males who are most capable, but do not reach their full potential (Ford, Moore, & Whiting, 2006). The opportunity gap emphasizes the lack of equality between Black students and their White counterparts and results that support the notion of the opportunity gap are demonstrated through formative assessments as well as high school and college retention and completion.

Given the phenomenon of institutional racism, many academic settings have put initiatives into place to assist students of color in reaching their optimal potential. Cherry Mulaguru of the Center for American Progress suggests that such initiatives include, but are not limited to, universal screening that assesses all students for giftedness, and creating gifted programs in urban areas, personalized learning, and stopping the excessive discipline measures taken against students of color. Mulaguru posits that these initiatives can move students of color toward college and career readiness. In addition to those initiatives, in February of 2014, President Obama launched a new initiative, My Brother’s Keeper, aimed toward empowering young boys and men of color. Today, this initiative continues to invest in creating effective strategies for Black male success. Unfortunately, many of these initiatives aimed at improving Black males’ academic success have little positive effect (Harper, 2013). The goal of these strategies is to heighten the success of Black males and elicit equity and excellence in academic settings. If institutional racism and social identity play a role in inhibiting academic achievement for Black males, then diminishing the negative effect of these might significantly propel Black males into academic success.

Consequently, additional research is needed to complement the current academic supports in place for Black males in the academic content. The experiences of Black males who
are academically successful can be used for these supports thereby diminishing the Black males’ educational crisis. This study seeks to explore the experiences of Black males who encountered institutional racism and socially identifies with one or more groups leading them toward their success.

**Justification for the Research Problem**

There is a significant body of research that focuses on the factors contributing to Black males’ educational failures and underachievement (Lynn et. al., 2010). Conversely, Black males are not instructed in how to circumnavigate institutional racism in their lives to attain academic success and researchers have yet to ask Black males “how they manage to transcend environmental, social, cultural, economic, and academic barriers undermining their achievement” (Harper, 2012, p. 26). As a result of this paucity in educational and sociological research, Black males’ perspectives on what institutions can do to improve academic success has yet to countermand the many negative depictions of Black males in educational settings. Researchers and others in society fail to inquire how Black males’ confidence, resilience, and commitments to educational goals are sustained. Supporting this notion is Harper’s (2012) apt statement, “No one is a better source of instructive insights on what it takes for Black men to succeed in college than Black men who have actually succeeded in college” (p. 25).

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

Although difficult and complex, educators must acknowledge racism is a significant factor impeding Black males’ academic achievement (Singleton & Linton, 2006). While some educators and researchers blame Black males for the racial achievement gap, this positioning of responsibility on Black males only overlooks the history of institutional racism in educational systems challenged through Brown versus the Board of Education and other educational policy
initiatives (Singleton & Linton, 2006). The prevalent and one-sided emphasis on Black males as the source of the educational crisis must be counterpoised with, insight from and the voices of, Black males who persist in educational systems in spite of institutional racism, navigate institutional racism, and contend with the individual, social and structural obstructions to achieve academic success and complete their college education; the voices of Black males who persist in educational systems is the focus of this doctoral thesis.

Relating the Discussion to Audiences

Black male participants in this study have graduated or are currently enrolled and are on their way toward successfully navigating the college environment. These Black males have the ability to guide upcoming Black males in grades K-12 that experience or have yet to experience institutional racism in their academic settings. Raising awareness of Black male experiences in higher education can identify ways to increase Black males’ academic preparation for the college learning environment, increase Black males’ college enrollment, and facilitate college completion in a timely manner. This approach can also highlight the importance of changing the current statistics by lowering unemployment and incarceration rates, and stabilizing marital relations. In Morris’ book, *Black Stats: African American by the Numbers in the Twenty-First Century* (2014), a recent study on Black statistics found that “35% of Black males are married in comparison to 56% of White males” (p. 153). Morris (2014) also noted that, “one in 12 Black Males ages 18-64 is incarcerated, compared with one in every 87 White males” (p. 158) as well as “Black males are imprisoned at more than 9 times the rate of White males” (p. 159). The implications of these statistics can be devastating to the future of Black male success both socially and academically. The academic dichotomy between Blacks and Whites is just one example of how deficit views are formed. In many instances, White populations are used as the
standard measurement of success and Blacks being measured against them. In contrast, research from an anti-deficit perspective can identify the keys to success that educators can only access by inquiring about Black males who have experienced academic success in spite of institutional racism.

**Significance of Research Problem**

“A system cannot fail those it was never meant to protect.”

~ W.E.B. Du Bois

Across the United States, a large population of Black males lacks success in the educational system. Moreover, as Ferguson (2007) posits, in order for the United States to compete globally, all people must be provided equity and excellence in education. Thus, the United States cannot expect to succeed if we are failing the Black male population. The challenges of being a Black male in a higher education setting is consistently mishandled and reinforced by educators, policy makers, academic journals, educational practice, and the media (Harper, 2012). It is imperative to learn more from educationally successful Black males who contradict the stereotype of lazy, unmotivated, disengaged, and underprepared.

If we continue to turn a blind eye to the Black males who are successful and only focus on those who are unsuccessful, it will be difficult to support the younger generation of Black males in negotiating institutionalized racism and “onlyness.” The term “onlyness” is defined as “the psychoemotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models, and guardians from one’s same racial or ethnic group” (Harper et al., 2011, p. 190). Carrying this psychoemotional burden leads to the younger generation of Black males at risk for educational failure. Educational failure can lead to an increase in the national dropout rate and incarceration rates. Lochner & Moretti (2003) write,
“One extra year of schooling results in a 0.37 percentage point reduction in the probability of incarceration for Blacks” (p.3). The National Association for the Advancement for Colored People (NAACP) reports that there are 2.3 million people incarcerated today. One million of these prisoners are Black (NAACP as reported by Lezama, 2014). Nationally, the Schott Foundation for Public Education 2010 reports that in 2008 only 47% of Black male students graduated when expected from U.S. high schools. In 2009, Black males represented 3.6% of athletes in intercollegiate sports teams, however 55.3% of Black males were on football and basketball teams at NCAA Division 1 institutions (Harper, 2012). Given these percentages, it seems the aggregate of successful Black males in higher education consist mostly of highly talented athletes. The image of successful Black males in higher education as only talented athletes sends a negative message to those young Black males who are not athletically inclined.

It is important to understand how Black males make sense of the negative messages and information they are exposed to in their lives. Educators need to focus on Black males who are constantly reflecting on the educational experiences, the images they are subjected to, as well as the institutional racism that they are attempting to or are overcoming. It is important to counterbalance the negative messages and information about Black males’ educational success with insights from those who understand the roots of their success and those who understand how they have risen above what society expects of them. Hence, Black males who have graduated from a higher education institution or currently hold a 2.75 GPA or higher and have persisted beyond their first two years of higher education will be recruited for this study. This research study about Black Males’ educational success will have implications for the continued success of Black males in America today.
Positionality Statement

“There is no such thing as institutional conditions without any individual actions and no such thing as individual action without institutional conditions. So there is always personal responsibility.”

~ Cornel West

From kindergarten to higher education, I experienced racism as a Black student as I attempted to assimilate to the dominant culture. West’s quote above therefore reflects my thoughts and feelings about my research topic and experiences. As a teacher in the inner city of Boston, I have a personal responsibility to contribute to Black males’ level of educational success. Before my awareness of Black males’ educational crisis, I subconsciously lowered my expectations for the Black males that I taught by engaging in curricula, policies, and practices that continue to serve the inequalities that Black males experience in many educational settings. I am teaching in a system where all teachers are not trained in teaching a multicultural population or executing a culturally proficient curriculum. I continue to support standardized testing policies where the State holds students accountable for test performance to determine intelligence, but the State itself is not held responsible for providing adequate teachers or educational resources (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Effectively teaching young Black males in the inner city of Boston is a unique experience. Black male students bring many external challenges that are stacked against them. Black males come from various economic backgrounds, demographics, and family households. Unfortunately for these students, the Black males who are academically successful have not had the opportunity to explain the roots of their success. I had to reflect on my own expectations regarding Black male students and acknowledge the effects of institutional racism in academic settings as a graduate of Northeastern University (NU), a Black woman, a Black teacher, and a mother of two Black boys.
Growing up, I was consistently told that I must try twice as hard as anyone else to prove my worth in society. While many parents may still believe that this statement is used to motivate their children toward success, it can also be perceived as a statement of how Blacks are growing up trying to “catch up” or prove their worth in a non-Black society. I exceeded all statistics that capture the experiences of less successful Black students. I was a college graduate. For me, however, that was not enough. I raised the bar higher for myself and applied to NEU for my Doctorate of Education. I was beyond excited when I first received my acceptance letter into the Doctoral Program at Northeastern University. I am the first in my family to receive a Master’s degree and beyond perhaps even my own expectations, the first who will receive a Doctoral Degree. The excitement of returning to my Alma Mater and earning a doctorate teaches my sons so much about their future possibilities, the accomplishments of their mother, and the position of Black educators in American educational institutions. Regardless of the adversities my sons will encounter, a person can do whatever he or she sets his or her mind to and if a person sets his or her mind on a goal, then it will be achieved. Essentially I am teaching my sons, and others who hear about my accomplishments, that being Black and successful is not just for a chosen few.

Before college, I was told several times that my worth would be decided not only by my grades, but my economic background, my relationships, my behaviors, my interests, but I learned early, it is also decided by my skin color. I learned through the American educational system that it did not matter how hard I worked, how well I carried myself, my interests, the amount of money my family lacked or had, or the relationships I developed, because the my skin color would exceed all prior judgments and contribute to the unleveled playing field I accessed for future opportunities. Silently I would be reminded that my worth was automatically leveled by the dominant culture given the color of my skin and how the dominant culture socially identifies
I walked in and looked around at the first Open House for Northeastern University doctoral candidates. I was disappointed yet not surprised that I was the only Black woman and there were no Black males at the event. I was greeted with “Hello, you must have the wrong room, this is for Doctoral Candidates in the CPS Program,” which bemused me. I replied, “No, I am in the correct room” and expected a look of shame from the White woman who stood before me. There was a blank stare almost long enough that I began to question my own right to be present, “Am I in the right room?” Of course I was. For a split second, I made an excuse that justified why a professor would make such an assumption such as maybe because I look so young or lost, but it was equally possible that in this day and age that remark was racist. Putting those thoughts and excuses aside, I thought ‘I am a Black woman who is going to exceed all prior low expectations.’ During my undergraduate time at Northeastern University, I was not alone with this goal. Many Black males and Black females overcame the blatant institutional racism and successfully completed college; hence, I am passionate about this study.

I want my sons to grow up with a different understanding of themselves, their educational opportunities, and their futures. Like many Black males that I teach, I am teaching my sons to question where to go to college, that is opposed to the questions about whether they will attend college. They question what leadership role they will choose to pursue as opposed to what limited options will be provided because of their skin color and lack of academic success. At the ages of 13 and 11, my sons are already living examples of positive-minded and academically successful young Black men. The lived experiences of my children’s success, thus far prompt me to engage in a qualitative phenomenological study of institutional racism and its motivating effect on the success of Black males. I seek to understand the lived experiences of successful
Black males and the meaning of these experiences, both academic and personal, to the participants in my study.

It is important for me to recognize my position during this research. As a Black student at Northeastern University, a Black woman, mother of two Black sons, and a teacher, I begin this study with a natural understanding of my social location and how racism affects marginalized identities such as race, class, culture, and gender. There are many studies that explain why Black males are not successful, but what do we know about those Black males who are successful? Little is known about the experiences of academically successful Black males who endured institutional racism and how those experiences relate to their success, how others perceive these successful Black males, and Black males’ perceptions of themselves and how these perceptions relate to their success.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1.) How do Black males who have achieved academic success throughout their educational careers make sense of their experiences overcoming institutionalized racism?

2.) How do the social identities of Black males influence their behaviors, perceptions and attitudes towards academic achievement?

Theoretical Framework

The primary theory guiding this study is social identity theory. This theory was used to interrogate the problem of practice, shape the scope of the literature review, inform the research questions, and inform the data collection and analysis. Critical race theory, described more in chapter 5, is also used as an analytical lens in chapter 5 to help make sense of the findings.

Social identity theory. Social identity theory is a social psychological perception of
whom a person is based on group membership, social processes, and intergroup relations (Hogg, 2006). Henri Tajfel developed social identity theory in Britain in the 1970’s. Tajfel’s interest in phenomena such as prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup conflict lent to many aspects of social identity theory. Tajfel (1979) hypothesized that groups who people belong to are contributors of self-esteem, pride, and self-perception. Furthermore these groups provide a person with a shared sense of belonging, shared interests, distinguishable shared attributes, and identity. Tajfel also proposed that grouping or categorizing people into “in-groups” and “out-groups” by similarities and differences is a normal cognitive process. There are three cognitive processes involved in evaluating in- and out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social categorization is the first process. People categorize others in order to identify and understand people in a social environment. Categorization serves several purposes including offering information about others, enlightening people about themselves as he or she compares and contrasts him or herself in relation to others and identifying appropriate behavior by using group norms as a standard of measurement. Adopting a group identity or identification is the second process. As individuals adopt a group identity, he or she draws meaning to the thoughts and behaviors and determine how characteristics conform to the groups to which he or she belongs. Social comparison focuses on intergroup comparison, therefore group members compare and contrast their group to others in their social environment. This comparative process leads to one group being perceived as superior to another. The process of social comparison can also result in low self-esteem, prejudice, discrimination, hostility toward out-group members, and competition of identities between in-group and out-group members (McLeod, 2008). Social identity theory can be viewed as a general theory that offers one explanation about Black males who socially categorize themselves as such and are academically successful.
Erikson (1968) theorizes that identity formation occurs when adolescents are able to select and discard childhood identifications in accordance to their interests, talents, values, and social response. Adolescents who do not successfully resolve their identity crisis experience identity confusion. Identity versus role confusion is a time when individuals are developing an understanding of ‘who I am’ and ‘who others think I am’ (Erikson, 1968). During this stage individuals explore personal characteristics, extracurricular interests, relationships, and cultural identity. Ethnic minorities go through an additional stage in which ethnic minority adolescents explore their cultural identity through the dominant cultural lens. This transitional stage questions the value of their culture including their physical appearance, style of dress, behavior, and manner in which one speaks. Role confusion can include withdrawal from family and friends, isolating oneself, immersing oneself in another culture, losing one’s identity in the crowd, as well as trying out different personalities and roles until reaching a stable sense of self.

This framework can support an interpretation of how Black males who socially identify as “successful men” conform their thoughts, behaviors, and actions to their social groupings and correlate with the prestige of this group membership. For example Morehouse College, a historically Black male institution in Atlanta Georgia, posits that success is an expectation not a desire. As Benjamin E. Mays, former President of Morehouse College aptly stated, "There is an air of expectancy at Morehouse College. It is expected that the student who enters here will do well. It is also expected that once a man bears the insignia of a Morehouse Graduate, he will do exceptionally well."

Conclusion

While the study’s chapter reviews the research and methods relevant to this project, it’s important to note that the trajectory of this study is to counterbalance the narratives of
unsuccessful Black males, with narratives of successful Black males. The few or limited studies
by Harper and other researchers suggest that factors beyond the individual Black male can result
in a context that leads to academic success. Social identity theory along with the tenets of
Erikson’s identity theory combined illuminates the process and impact of institutional racism.
Both theories suggest that the criteria for success of Black males are based on their own
perceptions of self and community. For example, many Black males perceive a draft to the NBA
more successful than a degree from an institution of higher education. The social construct of
this ideology can be analyzed by questioning what the appeal to a professional athletic career
may have over a degree held by a higher institution.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter analyzes institutional racism as well as its impact on socially-identified Black males. Two themes are particularly relevant to the body of research on Black males’ academic achievement in the college experience: (1) the factors associated with institutional racism and (2) institutional racism and social identity’s contribution to Black males’ academic success.

Definition of Terms

Because the research literature contains a variety of operational definitions for terms used in this doctoral thesis, the chapter begins by setting parameters for these terms. Race refers to physical attributes such as skin and eye color, hair texture, and bone structure. Racism is the conscious or unconscious assumption that one set of characteristics is superior to another set of characteristics (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Institutional racism, by contrast, is a system of inequality based on race or racism; institutional racism, like racism, can also be conscious or unconscious. Institutional racism is a pattern within social institutions in which particular groups are treated negatively, thus causing these institutions to “remain unconscious of issues related to race or more actively perpetuate and enforce a dominant racial perspective or belief” (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 41).

Most research presented in the literature citing Black males in higher education is in alignment with a deficit perspective (Harper, 2012). College retention, academic underachievement, and low rates of baccalaureate completion are just a few examples of the widely known and complex deficit-based perspective within which Black males are identified. The onus of the problem, however, should not be carried by Black males alone, but also be
linked to the larger structural problem of institutional racism. With little exploration of any structural account such as institutional racism, the entrenched patterns of academic and social inadequacies of Black males places the culpability on them alone. The deficit deprivation theory posits that the success of Black males is based on intellectual ability (Thompson, 2004). According to the hierarchy of this theory, Whites and Asians are at the top of intellectual pyramid and Blacks are at the bottom. This theory proclaims that Blacks are genetically incapable of excelling at the same rate as Whites and Asians because they are inferior (Thompson, 2004). Charles Murray and Richard Hernstein, authors of *The Bell Curve* also concur that academic success is based on intellectual ability. They concede that educational disparity is a fact of nature. Blacks simply do not have the genetic “smarts” to compete equally with Whites (Hernstein and Murray, 1994).

Harper (2013) notes that the deficit view of Blacks by educators, policymakers, and academic research journals amplifies the critical position that Black males are in academically. When only the failures of Black males are being documented, and academic successes are so often disregarded, an inadequate view of Black males’ educational experiences is presented (Jackson & Moore, 2008). Consistently highlighting the racial achievement gap between White and Black students and the failures of Blacks males suggests substantial racial problems within the educational system. At a time when racism is becoming more difficult to identify, irrefutably, it exists. Doane (2006) notes, a “key division in the debate over the nature of racism is between the definition of racism as [an] individual attitude or behavior and the view of racism as a set of systemic and institutional practices” (p. 267). The body of educational research is replete with negative portrayals of Black males in college including Black males’ as low achieving and less likely to succeed overall (Fries-Britt, 1998; Jackson & Moore, 2008). As Fries- Britt (1998)
writes, “the disproportionate focus on underachievement in the literature not only distorts the image of the community of Black collegians, it creates, perhaps unintentionally, a lower set of expectations for Black student achievement” (p. 556). The depiction of Black males as educational failures is embedded in social institutions such as schools, governmental organizations, and courts of law that both establish structures in society but also impose a cultural view that more so represents the dominant, non-Black culture.

We see this belief integrated into the educational system and in essence ‘builds up’ as Black males move through elementary school into the college setting. There are many alternative interpretations of institutional racism. The interpretation of institutional racism for this study crosses the “cradle to college” trajectory and explains the attrition that researchers identify in studies about Black males as well as grade retention, suspensions, alternative school placements, and the school-to-prison pipeline. In the next few paragraphs, the researcher explains the areas that several researchers believe set the broad foundation for institutional racism in the educational system. Following the introduction of these three prominent and foundational pieces, the researcher then offers a framework that employs the topic under investigation and delve deeper into the research questions formulated to guide this research.

**Grade Level Retention**

Students whom are retained in a grade level are considered academically unsuccessful and are not able progress on to the next grade level (Frey, 2005). Twenty-seven percent of 10th grade Black males experienced retention at least once in their educational careers compared to 18% of Hispanic students and 13% of White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Retention, although widely used in education systems, is not effective at increasing academic achievement, yet retention is increasingly used as an accountability strategy as more
educational systems emphasize accountability through testing (Larson & Akmal, 2003; Skiba, 2010, Walker, 2012). Grade-level retention results in lowered self-esteem, increased likelihood of behavioral issues, and diminished peer relationships (Skiba, 2010). The disproportionate number of Black males being retained can lead to more detrimental outcomes academically, including dropping out of school, suspensions, and alternative school placement (Walker, 2012).

**School Suspensions & Alternative School Placements**

School suspension is employed against a disproportionate number of Black males. More specifically, Black males are suspended 2.6 times more frequently than White males (Wald & Losen 2003, Walker 2012). Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert (2010) found that 49% of Black males in public middle and high schools compared to 21% of White males are disproportionately suspended by the educational institutions; This is the highest rate amongst all racial or ethnic and gender groups (Davis, 2003). This form of exclusionary, disciplinary action is carried through when a Black male’s behavior is often perceived as overly aggressive, disrespectful, or intimidating, regardless of the intent of the behavior.

In addition to school suspension, Black males are subject to alternative school placement at disproportionate rates. Students regarded as disruptive to the learning environment are placed in alternative schools (Texas Education Agency, 2007, Townsend Walker, 2012). Alternative school placements are implemented in accordance to the ‘Zero Tolerance Policy’ set forth in public school systems. The Zero Tolerance Policy gives school officials permission to discipline *any* infraction of the rules regarding students’ use or possession of drugs or weapons (Skiba, 2010). If the goal is to provide excellence and equity in education, studies show that Black male academic achievement has decreased over time and zero tolerance policies in schools are having a detrimental effect on them (Thompson, 2004). Beginning in grade school, Black males are
exposed to educators’ assumptions about potential, or inevitable deviance, diminished intelligence, and low probability of academic success (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). These perspectives are so ingrained in school cultures that deficit views of Black males are the norm. This systemic marginalization of Black males persistently leads Black males on a path away from education and many times directly into the criminal justice system (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2006).

**School to Prison Pipeline**

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 mandates that states use high-stakes standardized tests to measure educational outcomes. These high-stake tests are given in elementary through high schools and represent a single American culture. Additionally, teachers must teach the culture embedded in the test items to ensure that their students are promoted or graduate in a timely manner. These high stakes tests created by state governments make a single culture the norm for schooling, demonstrating educational achievement, and behavior related to testing (Spring, 2007). Christopher Jencks posits that labeling standardized testing “biased” means that the test claims to measure one thing and actually measures something else. Many psychologists agree that the scores on these standardized tests “also reflects a multitude of environmental influences” (Jencks & Phillips, 1998, p. 56) in that “[e]very test includes some items that appear to favor one cultural group over another” (Jencks & Phillips, p. 67). Standardized testing, as a result, impacts the Black and White test disparity gaps and is consequently viewed as racially biased. Students, who are not of the dominant culture, are likely to score poorly on these high stakes tests, labeling them below grade level as a result of the racially biased test items. As a consequence of being labeled as below grade level, Black students are often retained (Frey, 2005). Furthermore, school districts and States that implement retention policies based on these
high stakes tests set in motion negative educational outcomes for Black males (Greene & Winters, 2007). These outcomes have negative educational implications wherein poor academic proficiency leads to grade retention and grade retention can lead to high dropout rates; and high dropout rates lead to low college enrollment, and low college enrollment can lead to low paying jobs, underemployment, or unemployment, unemployment increases crime rates. Over the course of Black males’ educational career, this domino effect can lead Black Males on a trajectory towards prison; this trajectory is aptly named the “school to prison pipeline.”

Institutional racism patterns within social institutions that treat one group negatively based on race and imposing views of a dominant culture – known as institutional racism. Sometimes institutional racism can be very difficult to identify because of its subtle nature. In the following paragraphs, the researcher will discuss how institutional racism encompasses the factors of low teacher expectations, stereotyping, negative portrayals of Black males and microaggression against Black males that diminish Black males’ academic achievement and social identity. To research from an anti-deficit view, the researcher explains how Black males use different techniques, such as “racelessness,” to become successful.

**Low Teacher Expectations**

Thompson (2004) asserts that there is a commonness to the low teacher expectations for Black males resulting in underachievement. She posits that “teachers’ attitudes and negative beliefs resulting in low expectations and a non-challenging curriculum contribute to this underachievement” (p. 29). When teachers and administrators set low standards for Black students, they are not equipped with the knowledge and skill set needed to compete for admission into higher education facilities and high-paying jobs (Collins, 1992). As a consequence, K-12 schools have a differential effect on the achievement of Black males in that at
a very young age and Black male students are more likely to be stigmatized by teachers that identify Black males as having behavioral problems, marginal intelligence, apathy, laziness, and little to no interest in learning (Hilliard, 1991; Thompson, 2004). Kunjufu (1985) describes this phenomenon as the “fourth grade failure syndrome” and many Black boys experience it. While exhibiting high achievement and the potential for academic success in kindergarten, by grade four many Black boys have been labeled “underachievers” or are relegated to special education. Very rarely are Black male students collectively perceived as “gifted” (Noguera, 2002). Conversely, many Americans believe that students from different backgrounds are innately inferior to middle and upper-class White students (Thompson, 2004). Teachers that hold deficit beliefs and attitudes negatively affect academic achievement through their pedagogy and methodology. Gay (2000) writes “Over time, negative teacher attitudes and low expectations cultivate ‘learned helplessness’ among African American students” (p. 56). Singham (1998) supports Claude Steele’s research about the Stereotype Threat. He adds, when students are placed in a situation in which poor performance on a standardized test would support a stereotype of inferior abilities because of the student’s ethnicity or gender, then the student’s performance suffers when compared with those who do not labor under this preconception. (p. 5)

Considering race as a factor in the academic success of Black males is not something that White students have to contemplate. Moreover when Black students are given the same test as White students and were told that the test did not have any valued significance, but was being used as a tool for observation rather than evaluation, the difference in scores between White and Black students lessened. Steele refers to this as the “stereotype threat.” This threat of anticipated underachievement is magnified by continuous negative publicity based on race. One well-known
and oft-cited example, noted earlier, is high school graduation rates between Black and White males in which 52% Black males versus 78% White and non-Latino males complete high school (Black Boys Report, 2012). This phenomenon understood by Blacks and Whites alike has entered the national consciousness to the extent that Black males’ own perception is that their racial identity could be a contributing factor to the level of academic achievement lack in higher education. The media depiction of Black male academic achievement might subconsciously contribute to their negative self-perceptions as they begin the educational road to success on an unleveled playing field (Kozal, 1991).

**Stereotyping/Media Portrayal**

Stereotyping exists when isolated or individual-level characteristics are assumed to apply to an entire group (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Recently Black undergraduates report that White faculty members and administrators on predominantly White campuses fail to view Blacks as individuals, but rather as representatives of their racial group (Feagin & Sikes, 1995). For example Feagin & Sikes, who interviewed groups of African American males on predominantly White campus, report numerous circumstances in which White faculty and administrators had asked individual Black students questions about Black student enrollment as if one Black individual can speak for an entire racial group or educational outcome. Students also reported that in their college experiences on predominantly White campuses, White faculty had difficulty with the Black students’ substance, language, and style of writing in that White faculty stereotype Black students’ writing as Black English. Subtle behaviors, defined as microaggressions, such as stereotyping Black students’ writing often go unchallenged due to the ambiguous nature of the negative connotations. Harper (2009) notes, Black male students’ “individual and collective belongingness at Predominantly White Institutions is threatened by the
constant reinforcement of racist stereotypes” (p. 700) of being labeled athletes, criminals, and underprepared students. Many Black males enrolled in postsecondary education as full time students have faced the stereotype of being accepted because of Affirmative Action or athletic scholarships. Black males’ virility is consistently masked by preconceptions. Jackson & Dangerfield (2003) note, “the public narratives pertaining to Black men’s lives comply with several racialized social projections about the Black masculine body as (1) violent, (2) sexual, and (3) incompetent” (p. 123). These constant reminders of negative portrayals and stereotypes of how Black males are academically and socially depicted further undermine their academic achievement and their sense of self-acceptance (Harper, 2012). Germane to Harper’s findings, Jackson & Dangerfield (2003) also posit that some Black males negotiate their masculinity “in light of how they are socially and communicatively perceived” (p. 125).

Microaggression & Behavior

Microaggressions are verbal and environmental behaviors that are intentional or unintentional and communicate negative and derogatory racial insults (Sue et al., 2007). Microaggressive behavior is often very difficult to quantify because of its subtle and implicit nature yet these behaviors are enough to belittle and alienate members of a marginalized group. Examples of racial microaggressive behavior include denying racism exists stating that Whites are “color blind” and not acknowledging race, assuming criminal status, and asserting that race is not a factor toward success in education or career advancement (Sue et al., 2007). Without understanding of the dynamics of microaggressive behavior, stereotyping, or subtle racism, microaggressive behaviors remain harmful to the well-being and self-esteem of people of color (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). When portrayed negatively, Black males are consistently affected by microaggression where they are portrayed negatively. The
example in which a Black student reports that his instructor told him that he was speaking Black English is demonstrative of the ways microaggressions can be enacted. The student was quoted saying, Feagin & Sikes (1995) writes,“The instructor told me that I was speaking Black English. I was the only black in the freshman writing class. In one sense, it made me not want to be black” (p. 94). This example is illustrative of the extent to which teachers’ microaggressive behaviors can negatively influence Black males by causing Black males to question their intellectual ability and redefine academic success and ability to achieve it. Microaggressive behaviors also unconsciously discourage academic achievement and cause Black students to emulate whites in their attempt of academic success (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Feagin (2006) asserts, “Every day the African American students go through a series of interpersonal exchanges on campus, interactions from which they learn how they are viewed and how they must act and react” (p. 96).

Microaggressive behaviors change the perception that Black students have of themselves. The comparison of how Blacks “measure up” to Whites in itself is a microaggression that implies White culture is the ideal to which all others should strive for (Sue et. al. 2007). In the event of any social disparity, in which different racial-ethnic groups are being compared, Whites are usually used as the measure of success and Blacks are frequently used as a measurement of failure (Singham, 1998). The negative stereotypes and portrayals of Blacks are not only found in the classroom, on campuses but also in the media. As Christopher Emdin (2014), a well-known Urban Education expert and Associate Professor of Columbia University Teacher’s College aptly observes:

A wide array of black male images in media-music, movies, and television programs—take characteristics of black culture, tie them to anti-school identities, violence, and
misogyny, and use them as forms of entertainment. This means the world is inundated with scenarios that leave a false perception of black males that these youths must deal with when they enter classrooms. Such images don’t affect the academic performance of nonblack males nor how they interact with school. But black males are being socially typecast and face a constant internal dilemma of fitting into expectations embodying these false characteristics or finding spaces where they can engage in practices that are counter to the perceptions. (Different Is Not Deficient, para.2).

By virtue of Black males’ exposure to microaggressive behaviors, Black males begin to change their self-perception.

**Racelessness**

Signithia Fordham (1988) posits that Blacks, who aspire to be academically successful, and socioeconomically successful, experience the pressure of adopting a raceless identity. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) note that the larger community of Blacks is oppositional to mainstream American society. They assert that the larger Black culture is antithetical and negatively accredits those who perform well which have resulted in the low school achievement of Blacks. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) contend that high-achieving Blacks struggle with the decision of adopting behaviors that reflect Black culture and compromise high academic achievement or risk how they are perceived by others in the Black community and face accusations of “acting white.” Fordham (1988, 1996) suggests that high achieving Blacks minimize their relationship with the Black community and the stigma associated with “acting Black” to adopt a raceless identity in pursuance of upward socioeconomic mobility and academic success.

Maintaining cultural boundaries while academically achieving in the eyes of White
America creates a cultural binary in Blacks. In an attempt to protect Black identity and culture, while academically achieving in a time where white Americans refuse to acknowledge Black academic success, Blacks face a triple quandary where three experiences are negotiated. In *The School Achievement Of Minority Children*, A. Wade Boykin (1986) hypothesizes that in order for Black students to be successful within Black culture and outside Black social climates, they experience:

1) *The Mainstream Experience*: This is where cultural differences and diversity are integrated. Assimilation into the dominant culture creates a uniformed environment with shared goals, rules and values. Blacks may view this experience as inequitable or an attempt to maintain them in inferior positions.

2) *The Minority Experience*: This involves blaming Blacks for their own failures because they have not tried hard enough. During this experience, Blacks are exposed to oppressive conditions - cultural, political, social and economic - that placed them in the out-group of society, communities and schools. Under such conditions of racial profiling, segregation and African enslavement, the cycle of being discriminated against and being labeled inferior contributes to the ideology of Blacks’ being held in inferior positions.

3) *The Black Cultural Experience*: The complexity of negotiating how Black culture has been marginalized is the strategy for *The Black Cultural Experience*. One strategy includes a “cultural crossover,” assimilating into the mainstream White experience by internalizing successful rules and cultural values.

Black males who successfully negotiate Boykin’s theory of the triple quandary bi-cultural experience, drive this study to analyze the link between institutional racism, social identity, and
Black male success.

Professor Shaun R. Harper, Director of the Center for the study of Race and Equity in Education, conducted the National Black Male College Achievement Study, the largest-ever qualitative research study analyzing the link of institutional racism, social identity, and success among Black undergraduate males. Harper’s study occurred on 42 college and university campuses across the United States. The National Black Male College Achievement Study interviewed 219 Black male students who have demonstrated a range of success in various postsecondary educational settings. Included in Dr. Harper’s report were details of his participants’ lives. The participants offered personal experiences regarding enablers of their achievement including personal, familial and institutional (Harper, 2012).

Summary

This particular study and several other studies conducted by Dr. Harper complement this research by considering the anti-deficit perspective of Black male achievement. Harper notes that contributing factors such as high expectations and teacher and family support all contribute to the successes of Black males. In formulating the interview protocol, the researcher integrated Harper’s findings into the data collection instrument and analysis procedures. In response to the deficit view that treats Black males as monolithic entity, this study investigates the nuances within Black male social identities and how these nuances give rise to academic success. As stated, the goal of this study is to add to the conversation by providing insights of Black males who are academically successful.
Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

Theoretically, if institutional racism and social identity are leading factors inhibiting academic achievement for Black males and if overcoming these two factors may be significant factors that propel Black males into succession, then more must be explored regarding the experiences of the Black males who are successful. This study sought to do that by answering the following research questions.

1. How do Black males who have achieved academic success throughout their educational careers make sense of their experiences overcoming institutionalized racism?
2. How do the social identities of Black males influence their behaviors, perceptions and attitudes towards academic achievement?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) study was to understand the lived experiences of academically successful, Black males who have encountered institutional racism at private, predominantly White institutions of higher education in the Northeast. Academically successful, for the purpose of this study is being defined as students who are enrolled full time and/or have graduated from local higher education institutions. Institutional racism was generally defined as a pattern within social institutions in which particular groups are treated negatively thus, causing these institutions to “remain unconscious of issues related to race or more actively perpetuate and enforce a dominant racial perspective or belief” (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 41).

There are many factors encompassed by institutional racism that can attribute to the lack
of academic success for Black males; low teacher expectations, stereotyping and negative portrayals of ‘Black academics’, microaggressive behaviors and racist campus environments (Thompson, 2004; Harper, 2012). It is important to understand these factors of institutional racism and how it functions to support the disparities in educational success for Black males. In the following chapter, I will discuss institutional racism and how these factors can diminish Black males’ academic achievement.

While understanding that the deficit perspective on Black male academic achievement contributes to an increased understanding of the disparity in the educational achievement gap, its focus is myopic in that it has been instrumental in continuing to highlight conversations regarding the failures of Black men. The study begins to counterbalance the deficit perspective and that body of literature. Rather than examining the experiences of Black men who are unsuccessful, the researcher sought to understand the lived experiences of four to six successful Black males and the role that institutional racism and social identity play in shaping their perceptions, attitudes and behaviors in relation to academic achievement and persistence.

Research Paradigm

A paradigm, for the purpose of this study is defined as a “set of interrelated assumptions about the social world which provides a philosophical and conceptual framework for the organized study of that world” (Filstead, 1979, p. 34). The paradigm the researcher has chosen is social identity theory. The social identity theory paradigm is best suited to answer the research questions because it serves to disrupt what has been accepted as status quo. This paradigm is defined by two aspects: (1) the researcher will use this study as a form of cultural or social criticism and (2) certain basic assumptions are accepted (Ponterotto, 2005). Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) give further clarification: All thought is fundamentally mediated by power
relations that are socially and historically constituted; (b) facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; (c) language is central to the formation of subjectivity; (d) certain groups in society are privileged over others; (e) oppression has many faces and that focusing on one at the expense of others often elides the interconnections among them; and (f) mainstream research practices are generally implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression (pp. 139–140; see also Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001).

This study takes a dialectic approach of researcher-participant communication with the objective of empowering change and using the research to liberate oppressed groups. Denzin (1994) notes, “An emancipatory principle drives such research, which is committed to engaging oppressed groups in collective, democratic theorizing about” their perceptions of oppression and privilege (p. 509). How socially identified Black males attending or who have attended higher education facilities perceive and make sense of their experiences relating to the level of their academic success is one that needs to be explored. The qualitative research paradigm is rooted in American sociology and cultural anthropology (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Human experience is important in directing how we see the world. We cannot measure the importance of someone’s experiences but more importantly, we must try to understand how they make sense of their experiences. The researcher’s experiences being a Black woman, Alumna of one of the private, predominantly White institutions of higher education in the Northeast used to recruit participants, allowed her to build the trustworthiness of the project using qualitative research. The interpretations of this study cannot be separated from my background, context or prior understandings (Creswell, 2009).

Some may view experiences like these as private because of the sensitivity of meaning to
the participants and the possibility of the inquiry being intrusive (Walker, 2007). This qualitative research approach reveals life experiences that through data collection and analysis of patterns or emerging themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). When there is a phenomenon or problem that needs to be explored inductively, a qualitative study is conducted (Creswell, 2009).

**Research Design**

This qualitative research study represents interpretive inquiry where the researcher will interpret how successful Black males make sense of their academic and social experiences in higher education settings with regard to institutional racism. The researcher will interpret what is seen, heard and understood. Creswell (2009) affirms that qualitative research solicits information into the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human phenomenon.

**Research Tradition**

This research employed Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine the lived experiences of Black males at different, private, predominantly White institutions of higher education in the Northeast and how they make sense of their social identity and its relation to their academic success. The aim of IPA is to provide in-depth analysis of participants’ lived experiences and their own personal meaning behind those experiences. There are three key ideas for IPA researchers:

1. Humans exist amongst a world of objects, relationships, and languages
2. Our existence is always given from our own perspective, worldly and “in-relation-to” something
3. The interpretations of personal meaning are imperative to phenomenological inquiry in psychology (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis is a method that concerns itself with everyday
experiences that have become experiences of importance. It is both exploratory by discovering common themes and interpretive as it guides the researcher in making sense of the participants’ experiences. The field of IPA researchers acknowledge that “pure experience is never accessible” therefore the goal in IPA studies is to get as close to the experience as possible (Smith et al., 2009). Participants who make sense of their experiences and perceive them to be significant can be said to represent the experience itself. Human lived experiences can then be understood through the meanings that people impress upon them.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis is grounded in hermeneutics, which is a theory of interpretation. Drawing on hermeneutics, a tenet of IPA is that human interpretation informs making sense of life experiences. To that end, IPA employs two theoretical concepts: 1) experience and perception and 2) interpretation. Researchers using IPA act in ways similar to participants living through an experience in that they “[draw] on everyday human resources in order to make sense of the world” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 757). Researchers are involved as a, “double hermeneutic” in that they make sense of the participant trying to make sense of a particular phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Essentially, the researcher can only access the experience of the participant through what the participant shares, but the experience is also “being seen” through the lens of the researcher.

In IPA, there are two interpretive states of hermeneutics: (1) the hermeneutics of empathy and (2) the hermeneutics of questioning (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). These two interpretive states give the researcher an ‘empathetic’ interpretation from the participants’ viewpoint as well as observing from another angle while questioning what is being said. In other words, the researcher stands with the participant and experiences the phenomenon and questions the experience and its interpretation. Consequently, successful IPA research represents both an
understanding of the participants experience as well as an analysis and interpretation of the phenomenon.

There are four phenomenological philosophers that have contributed to ideas of how to examine and understand lived experience. These four philosophers have their own distinct way of approaching the study of experience, however, similarly, they share the interest of thinking about the various aspects of the lived experience of being human. The following paragraphs will examine the ideas of Husserl, Heidegger, Merlou-Ponty, and Sartre and how eventually a pluralist ideology was formed.

**Husserl.** Husserl argued, “the founding principle of phenomenological inquiry is that experience should be examined in the way that it occurs, and in its own terms” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 197). Husserl believed that phenomenology involved carefully examining how one comes to know and understand his/her own experience of a particular phenomenon. He argued that not seeing every “thing” for itself as something outside of our everyday experience impedes us in the way of experiencing that “thing” in its own right. For Husserl, phenomenological inquiry focuses on the experience that takes place in the consciousness of the individual. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) writes “Husserl developed a ‘phenomenological method’, which was intended to identify the core structures and features of human experience” (p. 233). He believed that as humans we tend to take objects for granted that we experience everyday, our perceptions limit objects’ existence. The phenomenological method acts through reductions. Smith et al (2009) reports, “Each reduction offers a different lens or prism, a different way of thinking and reasoning about the phenomenon at hand” (p. 245). The purpose of reductions is to consider different streams of consciousness; how things are perceived, judged, remembered, thought about and valued to establish its essence. While Husserl focused his energy
on the essence of experience, IPA has taken on the unassuming role of examining each particular experience from the consciousness of particular people.

**Heidegger.** Heidegger was first a student of Husserl. The differences between the two philosophers were slight but discernable. Husserl focused on the interpretive abstract view of the world while Heidegger questioned knowledge outside of being interpretative. Heidegger concerned himself with the worldly perspective of what is possible in existence and what is meaningful; the two concepts of what is physically-grounded and what is inter-subjectivity-grounded. The concept of intersubjectivity is the foundation of how one relates and his/her ability to communicate and make sense of the people around them. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis benefits from Heidegger’s posits that human beings exist amongst a world of relationships, objects and languages (Smith, et.al., 2009). Existence or being, is an interpretation of what is made meaning of, based on perspective and relation to time and always in relation to something else.

**Merleau-Ponty.** Merleau- Ponty echoed much of what Husserl and Heidegger identified about being-in-the-world however, his view clearly added one distinction. Merleau-Ponty indicated that the view of the world from a human perspective is not engaging but differential. Humans view themselves as beings in communication with the world as opposed to being within it (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The embodied experience of another human in relation to the world is just that, their experience. Humans can never fully empathize with another human’s experience. Each human experience is lived through, which for the observable human; those experiences are simply presented. The activities and relations in this world are key to Merleau-Ponty’s view. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis researchers benefit from this view as they attempt to make meaning of participants’ experiences in the world and the researcher seeking to understand
what it means for the participant.

**Satre.** Satre’s views embody the works of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Satre describes human existence as ongoing. Humans are always in the process of becoming who they are. For Satre, who we are and our perception of how we see the world are both reliant upon things that are absent and things that are present. Human nature defined for Satre is the constant state of becoming and free will. In that regard, every human is responsible for his/her actions. The complexity of this view must incorporate personal and social relationships, so humans are able to conceive their experiences morally, interpersonally, and affectively.

**The pluralist ideology.** Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Satre all have contributed to the development of IPA research. Through the works of these philosophers, IPA invokes the importance of experience, perceptions, relationships between humans and the world, and the individual meanings behind each experience. Through the contributions of these writers, the complexity of IPA offers a simplified explanation of experience being a lived process defined by individual perspectives and meanings. An individual’s interpretation and meaning of a lived experience is the focus of IPA. This qualitative research attempts to interpret and make sense of a phenomena based on the meanings an individual gives to it (Creswell, 1998).

**Participants and Sampling Strategy**

In order to maximize variation in the study sample, the researcher attempted to have five participants of this qualitative study who are currently enrolled as full time students of private, local, predominantly White higher education institutions. These Black males have persisted beyond their first two years of higher education and two out of the five participants have already graduated. The rationale for this is to build patterns, categories and themes for more abstract units of information (Creswell, 2009). They range in age and socially identify themselves as
successful Black males. There were three determinants of success that were employed for the purpose of this study:

1. Previously or is currently enrolled as a full time local University student
2. Enrolled participants maintain(ed) a minimum of a 2.75 GPA or above
3. Five to seven participants, academic or social member (athletic team, fraternity, cultural, social or academic club

Each participant holds or held a minimum of a 2.75 average and is or was a member of an on campus social group. The social groups consisted of, but was not limited to, an athletic team, cultural club, and fraternity. The findings of this phenomenological study provide emerging themes (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Smith & Osborne (2003) indicates “IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes. The detailed case-by-case analysis of individual transcripts takes a long time, and the aim of the study is to say something in detail about the perceptions and understandings of this particular group rather than prematurely make more general claims” (p. 55). A noted limitation of this study is that the participants do not represent the total population of Black males, which limits the “generalizability of results” (Smith, 2008, p. 103).

**Recruitment and Access**

The researcher began with a written proposal to Northeastern University institutional review board (IRB) that is a part of higher education administration requesting permission to conduct a research study on a particular study site’s campus (Appendix A). No permission was required for participants that volunteered by word of mouth. The participants recruited for this study self-identify as a Black male full-time student at a private, predominantly White institutions of higher education in the Northeast. The five participants ranged in age from 19 years to 47 years and have persisted beyond their first two years in a higher education facility. In
order to recruit participants for this study, the researcher drafted a flier to athletic and social
organizations within a local private, predominantly White institution of higher education in the
Northeast. Those willing to participate called or emailed the researcher with their contact
information (Appendix B). The researcher also visited campuses several times with hopes of
recruitment. This study offered a small compensation for time and travel for up to five
participants who participated in three semi-structured interviews (Appendix D) and one post
interview consultation regarding their lived experiences as socially-identified Black males in
higher education. Participants were informed that all answers will be kept confidential and
pseudonyms were be used to protect all participants.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

There were no direct or indirect risks to any of the participants in this study. The purpose
of this research was to interview and collect data of students who attend(ed) private,
predominantly White local institutions of higher education and socially identify as Black males
and the meanings behind their lived experiences. The IRB Policy Manual, 11.0 is based on
Diversity in Research. It states that research that involves human subjects must include both
gender and minorities so that "the findings can be of benefit to all persons at risk of the condition
under study." It also states that if in fact this is not displayed in the research, "a clear,
compelling rationale for exclusion or inadequate representation should be included." This
particular study focused on Black males’ lived experiences with institutional racism, social
identity and its relation to academic achievement throughout higher education. All male
participants were made aware of all information regarding this study prior to voluntary
participation and the appropriate guidelines were followed according to the study site’s Office of
Research Regulatory Compliance. Participants signed an Informed Consent Document
(Appendix D). All participants had the freedom to not participate at any time during this study (Appendix B).

**Data Collection**

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. As Smith & Osborne (2007) state, “This form of interviewing allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participants’ responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise” (p. 57). Because the focus of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis is to “perceive and make sense of things that are happening to them” (p. 57), it was important to build a rapport with participants and the interview be followed by the participants’ interests or concerns. Socially and psychologically the interviewer attempted to learn the position of the respondents. The flexibility of a semi-structured interview permitted this to occur. The researcher used the method of “responsive interviewing” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This method worked hand in hand with the research participants; they were treated as “conversational partners” rather than objects of research. During this approach, the researcher responded and asked further questions about what was heard rather than relying solely on what was originally intended as interview questions. Although this form of interviewing was more time consuming and at points was more difficult for the researcher to analyze due to the interviewee having more control, it produced rich data. Responsive interviewing involves formulating and asking three types of questions; main, probes, and follow-up. Main questions addressed the research problem and the overall structure of the interview. Probing questions elicit detail and assists in managing the conversation, while follow-up questions are in response to what interviewees have said. Follow-up questions may elicit even more detail than originally given. As Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) write “Transcripts of
interviews are analyzed case by case through a systematic, qualitative analysis. This is turned into a narrative account where the researcher’s analytic interpretation is presented in detail and supported with verbatim extracts from participants” (p. 4). The researcher interviewed each participant three times. The first interview gained informed consent followed by an informed consent question form (see Appendix C) and the researcher built a rapport with the participants. The second interview targeted questions aligned directly with the theoretical framework and literature review. The third and final interview was for member checking. Each face-to-face interview lasted between 45-60 minutes. The researcher and participants agreed on interview locations to ensure comfort for the research participant and the researcher.

**Data Storage**

Audio recordings, reflective memos and transcribed interviews were stored both in a personal file on the researcher’s computer as well as on a flash drive and kept in a secured file cabinet. The researcher kept reflective memos to give the researcher the ability to capture reflective thinking (Maxwell, 2005). Maxwell writes, “A memo can range from a brief marginal comment on a transcript or a theoretical idea recorded in a field journal to a full-fledged analytical essay. What all of these have in common is that they are ways of getting ideas down on paper (or in a computer), and of using this writing as a way to facilitate reflection and analytic insight (p. 12).” The researcher approached this study systematically. Reflective memos are approached two ways. Maxwell (2005) also writes “The first is that you engage in serious reflection, analysis, and self-critique, rather than just mechanically recording events and thoughts. The second is that you organize your memos in a systematic, retrievable form, so that the observations and insights can easily be accessed for future examination” (p. 13). Only the researcher had access to these files to protect the anonymity of the participants and ensure the
validity of data. The recordings and data will be destroyed after the completion of the dissertation.

**Data Analysis**

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis has very specific steps for the data analysis process. The researcher, through the process of reflective memoing, reflected upon her own preconceptions/biases about data collected and attempted to suspend these ideas so the focus remained on the experiences of the participants. After semi-structured interviews were transcribed through the service of Rev.com, they were coded with focuses on the participant's personal meaning, and sense making to the researcher’s interpretation of those meanings. This was the first round of coding methods used by the researcher, In vivo coding. In vivo coding, captures the words, short phrases, or terms used by the participants to honor and prioritize the voices of the participants. As Saldana (2009) describes, “In Vivo coding is particularly useful in educational ethnographies with youth…voices are often marginalized, and coding with their actual words enhances and deepens an adult’s understanding of their of their cultures and worldviews” (p. 74). The second cycle of coding reorganized and reanalyzed the first cycle of coding. The primary goal during second cycle coding, was to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from first cycle codes (Saldana, 2009). Second cycle coding looks for patterns and how everything fits together. The researcher used pattern coding as the second cycle of coding method. Pattern coding is a way of grouping summaries into smaller sets, themes, or constructs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) write that “Themeing is the outcome of coding, categorization and analytic reflection,” the patterns of participants’ thoughts and feelings. Finally, graphically representing the recurrent group themes assisted the researcher in making claims between commonality and
individuality, convergence and divergence (p.107). A phenomenological account of this data answered research questions and offered suggestions for further research and findings. The following steps took place for data analysis:

Step 1: Reading and rereading: This step ensured that the researcher was completely familiar with the data. The researcher knows the data well enough to form analytical insight. The researcher is able to locate specific information that supports or challenges evidence.

Step 2: Initial noting: As the researcher was observing and interviewing, any and all analytical notes were significant. Initial noting took place in a written journal and on the computer.

Step 3: Developing emergent themes: The researcher looked for any words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs that described the phenomenon of how institutional racism and self-identity contributes to levels of academic success for Black males.

Step 4: Connections of emergent themes: The researcher looked for interrelationships between words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs to code together into categories. The researcher’s goal was to see how these categories are connected.

Step 5: Moving to the next case: For each participant, the researcher continued to look for patterns. With In vivo coding, capturing what each participant considered significant was the goal of the researcher. This included keywords and phrases that are associated with the problem of practice.

Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases: Across cases it was important for the researcher to identify consequential words and phrases such as “if,” “and,” “then,” and “because.” Miles & Huberman (1994) posit that this allows the researcher to infer the regulations, sources and interpretations in the data.
**Trustworthiness**

There are two methods that were instrumental in ensuring trustworthiness. The researcher primarily used member checking and thick descriptions. Member checking was used to establish credibility. Through formal and informal observation and discussion the researcher and the participants were able to assess interpretations and correct wrongful interpretations. This also provided the opportunity to summarize preliminary data. Ezzy (2002) recommends the following strategies to assess trustworthiness: (1) check interpretations that have been established by the researcher with the participants themselves; (2) code data as the initial transcribing takes place; and, (3) keep notes in a reflective journal with an abundance of analytic memos. The researcher used thick descriptions to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. Thick descriptions were used described the phenomenon to such an extent that possible transferability of findings to other people, times, settings, and situations could be assessed.

**Limitations**

The limitations or potential weakness (Creswell, 2012a) of this study was its focus on a small number of participants whose experiences are bound by and are limited by currently attending or have attended and successfully graduated from private, predominantly White institutions of higher education in the Northeast. Therefore, the findings from this study may not be applicable to all Black males who have been faced with institutional racism. This results from each higher education institution having its own culture of how racism looks on their campus as well as the different perspectives of the Black males in attendance there. This research provides insight based on the perspective of Black males and not the assumptions of those who have not shared their experiences. This study sought to explore the experiences of Black males who encountered institutional racism and socially identifies with one or more groups that has led to
them toward their success. Therefore, the research is valid for potential Black male students entering various private, predominantly White institutions of higher education in the Northeast ergo fulfilling the criteria of transferability “…the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Shenton, 2004, p. 69).”

Another limitation was the lack of an established relationship with the participants of this study. The relationship between the researcher and the participants was limited to the initial interview and two subsequent meetings. An established relationship could have possibly built more trust and the participants could have been more open to sharing meaningful experiences. Lastly, the researcher bias limited the understanding of how the participants make sense of their experiences from a male perspective, however, the ability to empathize based on race assisted in the line of questioning.
Chapter IV: Findings

Introduction

Academic achievement for Black males in the United States is in a state of educational crisis. Institutional racism – including low teacher expectations, stereotyping, media portrayals, self-perception and acceptance, micro-aggressions as well as Black males’ social identity – contribute to Black males’ level of academic success. Using social identity theory as a framework, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1.) How do Black males who have achieved academic success throughout their educational careers make sense of their experiences overcoming institutionalized racism?

2.) How do the social identities of Black males influence their behaviors, perceptions and attitudes towards academic achievement?

Participants

There were five participants interviewed for this research study. The participants represented four private, predominantly White, institutions of higher education in the Northeast. Two participants have graduated from two of these Higher Ed. institutions and three participants are currently enrolled and have surpassed their freshmen year.

Table 1: Overview of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Year of Graduation</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Social/Cultural/Athletic Clubs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suncere</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>CEO of Urban Planning Group</td>
<td>5% Nation of Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Sr. Business Project Manager</td>
<td>Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adewale</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Black Student Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jailin</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>F.A.M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Caribbean Student Union</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“You must let suffering speak, if you want to know the truth.”

~Cornel West

Meet the Participants

The following description of the participants serves two purposes. First, the description provides the reader with some insight into who the participants are in terms of their demographic background and life experiences before entering into a predominantly White institution of higher education. Second, the descriptions are then linked to the social identities of the participants while they are a part of a predominantly White institution.

Suncere

Suncere is originally from the Northeast region and lived in a low income neighborhood that was predominantly Black. He was born and raised with both parents in the home until about 8 years of age and then his parents divorced and his father left the home. Both his parents graduated from high school. Both parents along with other family members pushed education and strong cultural values at a young age. Both parents completed some college and his father went to school on a football scholarship. His father was a firefighter and later passed away. Upon graduation from high school, Suncere was expecting his first child. When Suncere’s son was born, he left college to assist with raising his son. Sometime later, he returned back to college and completed his undergraduate degree. Today, Suncere is a college graduate of a predominantly White institution of higher education in Boston, MA with a degree in African American Studies.

Eric

Eric grew up in Providence, Rhode Island. His community was predominantly Black and Latino. He was adopted by two Black parents and grew up with both in the home. His parents are
married and have been together for over 40 years. Both of Eric’s parents completed no more than a high school diploma or some college. Mom has her high school diploma. Dad has his GED. He dropped out, served in Vietnam and then came back and completed some college courses. Both parents are retired today. Dad is a disabled Vietnam Vet from the US postal service and mom is a retired administrator. Eric says that his dad is his biggest positive role model and his uncle who is a Professor. He attended and graduated from a four year predominantly White University in Boston, MA with a degree in Finance.

Adewale

Adewale is of Nigerian heritage and grew up in a community “with people with high amounts of melanin in their skin.” His neighborhood was comprised of mostly Nigerians. Adewale’s parents are still married. Both parents hold Bachelor degrees and one parent is currently working toward his Master’s. Growing up, he was surrounded by family friends in the fields of Health & Science and Law. He was inspired at a young age by his parents and these family friends. College was never “optional.” Adewale grew up with the expectation that college was in his and his siblings’ future. He attended a predominantly White institution for his K-12 academic years and currently attends a private, predominantly White institution seeking his undergraduate degree in Health Sciences with a minor in Communication Studies.

Jailin

Jailin grew up in 5 towns within a 5 mile radius of each other in New Jersey. The majority of his childhood was spent in Asbury Park, a predominantly Black community. At the age of six, Jailin’s mom left and his grandmother raised him and his siblings. Over the years mom was in and out of Jailin and his siblings’ life but they communicate today. Jailin has two siblings, both sisters, one being transgender. When asked how Jailin self identifies he used the
words understanding, idealistic and caring; however, he believes that others perceive him as being lazy, too sensitive, and “the opposite of being goal oriented.” Jailin did not go into specifics about his mom’s absence but he did mention Dad was also not around while Jailin was growing up. He recalls seeing Dad once when he was young, once when he was eighteen and a couple of times since then. Jailin aspires to change education when he graduates in 2017 with a degree in Education.

**Kyle**

Kyle is Bajan and grew up in Hempstead, New York. His community was very diverse but his school district consisted of mostly Blacks and Latinos, with a large population of Haitians. His school district, Uniondale is one of the top 10 Black counties in terms of finances. He grew up with both parents and his grandmother in the home. His parents are still married today. Mom completed high school and dad is in the process of working toward his second Master’s. Kyle has always looked up to his father as a positive influence as well as his best friend Georgio, who is also a Black male. Meeting Georgio in 7th grade, he was more boisterous and popular, while Kyle was more quiet. Kyle says that at middle school age, kids are either “doing things to fit in” or “doing things to keep you out” of the community. For Kyle, he described middle school in the following statement, “not liking the vanity of it at all.” Georgio in spite of their personality differences, became his best friend and they both strived to do well together academically. He remembers having various Black teachers, some African American and some West Indian, both male and female who were very impactful. He described a female Nigerian teacher he had in high school that changed him. He was able to speak to her for hours about anything. They about life, the Universe, the energy, and the forces against US Black people and how to navigate such things. Kyle is pursuing a degree in Health Science.
Summary of Participants

The brief descriptions of the participants share different ideologies, perceptions, experiences, cultures, and pathways to success. These descriptions also allude to the social identities that influenced the participants in middle school and beyond. While beginning to shape their social identities, these participants were embedded in contexts that are discussed in Chapter 2 and shaped by the achievement gap, opportunity gap, and the anti-deficit perspective. Their experiences of navigating through their educational careers from youth to higher education in the face of institutional racism gives voice to specific tools that may be helpful to Black male youth today. All five participants in this study were raised by family members who value(d) education. All five participants were able to identify many defining moments where, although the odds were not in their favor, they persisted through and continued on the road to success.

Thematic Analysis

Each of the five participants shared stories of their experiences with institutionalized racism and how social identity influenced their behaviors, perceptions and attitudes towards academic achievement. These experiences as well as how the participants made sense of these experiences gave rise to four themes: 1) Black males who were raised with a knowledge of self and knowledge of their history are more likely to succeed; 2) Self-advocacy is a necessary skill for overcoming the various complexities of racism; 3) White privilege is not just for Whites; and, 4) Vision creates reality.

Each participant shared different ideologies, perceptions, experiences, cultures, and pathways to success. Their experiences of navigating through their educational careers from youth to higher education in the face of institutional racism gives voice to specific tools that may be helpful to Black male youth today.
Knowledge of Self and Knowledge of History Help Black Males Succeed

The participants in this study have been raised with an understanding of who they are as young Black men. The likelihood of success derives from this understanding and the origin of their very existence. Three sub-themes were aligned to this overarching theme: (1) knowledge of self, (2) knowledge of history, and, (3) assistance toward success.

Knowledge of self. Participants described knowledge of self clearly in ways that supported the notion that these men believe in themselves as academically successful Black men in their respective University. The challenge for these men, however, came from the impressions that others place on these Black males because of the phenotypical presentation and the assumptions that these outsiders imposed on these Black males.

Kyle shared:

When I was younger it [getting to know myself] was more forced, today it’s more conscious. I like being Black, Afro-Caribbean. I take pride in it. I think a lot of my confidence comes from me being self-reflective.

In this excerpt, the participant alludes to the change in how he sees himself and how this current vision of himself is one of a confident, academically successful Black male. Adewale and other participants echoed the notion of a confident self-identity in the following reflection on others’ attributions to his Black maleness in an academic environment. He says,

To some people, I was an Oreo. I wasn’t masculine enough. I didn’t abide by toxic, European forms of masculinity and they did, and it was conflicting. I’m an overly confident human. I believe in my self-worth as a person.

Using “Oreo” as a reference implies that Adewale is perceived as Black on the outside and White on the inside. This attribution of “Oreo” comes from others and is imposed upon Adewale.
Adewale responds by not conforming to the notion of what it means to be Black or White in today’s society, but rather what it means to value oneself as a human. He notes, when one values oneself, success is a given.

Counter to the prior respondents’ knowledge of self, Eric challenged the notion of outright acceptance of Black male identity in the following statements.

I never wished I wasn’t Black. At times I wished that I wasn’t the only Black kid in school. It [being Black] changed me in that I felt that I had to carry and conduct myself a certain way in order to be accepted by the White community in which I was surrounded. Sometimes I don’t feel Black enough. Sometimes I feel like I’m too Black, depending on what set of Black friends.

Eric rejects the ethnic isolation of his circumstances rather than his Black male identity. The results of his circumstances colliding with his Black male identity results in Eric “carrying” himself in a “certain way in order to be accepted by the White community.” Eric is the first participant to introduce the Black male identity in relation to the White community and how this relation changed Eric’s behavior. Similarly, Jailin discusses the German, Jewish influences on his Black male identity in that the attributes of being a Black male many times does not include a Jewish heritage. Jailin says,

I think a lot of our perceptions of oneself, or I take other people’s perception strongly, but I think those perceptions reinforce how you deal with yourself sometimes, so a large part of my life was listening to other people’s views of me and letting that build on my own habits or views of my own strengths, and that influence I had to kind of dispel in my adult life, or look at more critically or constructively, I guess.

All participants had a well-explicated identity as an academically successful Black male.
These identities are outcomes that, behind the mask, review challenges that they faced and still contend with or have overcome. These identities are drawn from the participants’ personal and family histories that will be deconstructed next before tying the history of these men with their sense of identity.

**Knowledge of history.** Suncere’s knowledge of self and his history was deeply embedded in him as a young Black “God” from his father. His identity as a “supreme being” left no other option but success in anything he “willed” to happen. He shared: “Dad was a knowledge seed (dark man) and did not have lessons but was conscious of our origins before us being brought here to the wilderness. We are the fathers and mothers of civilization.”

This system of education provided by Suncere’s father both broadly and individually influences Suncere’s way of life and how he sees the world. In this comment, Suncere was taught specific lessons about Blacks’ role in civilization. This awareness influences his role in society and culture today.

In Kyle’s response, he touched on the dichotomy between the West Indian mindset and the African American mindset.

I see a lot of differences between my Dad [West Indian] and let’s say my friends [African American]. He exemplifies a lot that I see out of West Indian males coming over here. African-American males tend to have a victimized mindset; I tend to have that sometimes. Like, ‘Oh damn, this is just happening to me or this is just happening to us because we’re Black males and this is the stereotype,’ whereas, my dad came here from a primarily Black country or island. He came to the U.S. thinking the world was full of opportunity. Being born a Black male in America is seen as negative because of media, or what we see and not having Black role models. For my dad, coming to America as a
Black male ensured he and his family’s success. Now, I am very, very proud of my heritage.

This response magnifies the importance of a confident mindset. The mindset of believing in opportunity is an option for anyone who puts forth the effort. This participant also alludes to the strength of his heritage being a caveat for a changed mindset. Having knowledge of his own history and heritage, Kyle is able to differentiate what he was raised to believe and what the media feeds Black males who do not have positive role models. In this response, Kyle contrasts the mindset of those born in the West Indies to those born in the U.S. His experience with his father indicates that difference in perspective. He was born with the belief in opportunity, the belief that this country will provide what he needs to succeed; whereas, Blacks born in America continue to carry a victimized mindset.

Adewale reiterates the effects of a victimized mindset.

I think sometimes we’re [Black males] conditioned and we believe to be self-deprecating and I wasn’t like that as a child. I wasn’t raised like that. My parents raised me to think for myself, they facilitated growth. If I had different parents who didn’t allow me to grow and be my own person, I would definitely be in a different place than I am right now.

In this comment, Adewale’s parents, who are from Nigeria, play an important role in his success. They raised Adewale with a sense of self-appreciation. He was taught to think for himself and trust his thoughts; beliefs and success will be inevitable. A victimized mindset does not allow an individual to exercise proper growth and an optimistic perspective.

Jailin makes the comparison of perception between his ethnicity and his physical appearance. Upon his awareness of his ethnic background and the absence of Judaism as a
religious practice, Jailin began to amalgamate his physical appearance with his self-identity as a Black male. He notes, with the understanding of his background and claiming his identity, success was certain.

I remember becoming very aware of my nationality, and obviously, I was American, but my family was very proud and cognizant of its relationship to Germany, and in particular Jewish Germany, because my great grandfather came over from Germany, and both of his parents were in Auschwitz. So I remember having a strong salience, because literally nobody in the world looks at me and thinks German or Jewish, obviously. Because we didn’t practice religion, we just held it as an ethnicity out of respect for our family, so I just remember becoming closer and closer and closer to my Black identity because of the way people were perceiving me and treating me, and just made me become very, very aware of what it meant to be Black.

**Assistance toward success.** The likelihood of success is not one that is based on the color of one’s skin but the depth of self-efficacy.

Kyle states,

We don’t trust ourselves enough. We don’t trust enough that things will work out. I don’t want to say trust the processes and be stagnant and be complacent, but just have a plan. If you don’t have a plan, allow yourself to experience more. Love yourself and love our Black women.

Kyle explains that successful Black males don’t just need hope. They need to recognize toxic masculinity. Black males need to realize, “Nobody is better than you. Nobody in this world is better than you, but you are no better than anybody else.” This mindset creates self-efficacy and self-advocacy.
In each of the participants’ responses, the perception of oneself and how others perceive him can only be fully understood with the knowledge of who he is and the culture he has been taught to live by that will lead to irrefutable success.

**Self-Advocacy is a Necessary Skill for Overcoming the Various Complexities of Racism**

The connection between knowledge of self and self-advocacy is inherent in knowing who you are and where you come from so you can endorse yourself. Two sub-themes were aligned to this overarching theme: (1) self-advocacy and (2) racism.

**Self-advocacy.** Discussions regarding self-advocacy have been extremely helpful for Black males in navigating their way around a predominantly White campus, assisting other students with guidance for financial matters and social justice matters, and simply living in a new environment. Adewale offers this insight about self-advocacy,

> Predominantly White schools [K-12] teach their students, and I’m assuming this is also from their family, teach their students to advocate for themselves, which they don’t teach Black kids at predominantly Black institutions. The ability to advocate for oneself is not taught in our schools but in our homes. In White schools, it’s like, ‘You’re entitled to this, so if you don’t get this, you should advocate for this.’ Whereas in schools with a lot of students of color, Hispanic, Black kids, whatever, well, ‘This is the best you’re going to get, so I would accept it if I were you.’

The ability to advocate is not innate as Adewale indicates in the above quote. Adewale aptly suggests that White students are taught to self-advocate because they are entitled to resources, while Black kids are socialized to settle for what resources are given to them. Each of the participants in this study has had the opportunity to advocate for himself.

Furthermore in Adewale’s quote above he identifies that being aware of how he self-
identifies helps Adewale advocate for a successful future.

While acknowledging that racism exists, the effects of racism are diminished greatly by those who know who they are and utilize their ability to persist through racist perceptions. As he continues to explain,

Sometimes it’s hard to see outside of yourself and to see outside of your environment. Without either being exposed to something or have representation of it, it’s hard for people to get out of that. I would say that most of the dudes who are successful have had some type of experience, some type of representation around them, or saw outside of their own environment to see that their success was possible. Self-efficacy. The belief that success is possible, that they can achieve that.

The complex phenomenon of racism can affect not only one’s own explicated identity but also how one lobbies for him or herself. Self-advocacy is a learned behavior that increases through meaningful experiences. Adewale states,

The ability to see success around one’s community, have role models that look like you builds a belief that I too, can succeed. So I advocate for myself. Regardless of how people perceive me; people who are prejudice, racist, whatever. Success will only come if you believe that you are deserving of it because of who you are and that has nothing to do with the color of your skin.

Contrary to Adewale’s view, Jailin’s experiences with self-advocacy as a Black male was not instilled in him as a young man but rather, learned as he got older. He began advocating for himself in his sophomore year of high school.

I had an English teacher named Ms. Iannello who read something that I wrote and decided that I should have been in her honors class, which was the first time I heard
anything like that, and she kept kind of pushing that out, so like, I was such a smart kid, for the rest of that year, which, you know, I had failed several times when I was a freshman. I just wasn’t trying anymore in high school, and then, the next year, I end up doing AP and honors for the rest of my time in high school, my junior and senior years. My beginning and second half of high school are completely opposite of each other. I just remember it just being literally that I just thought that I was smart, I advocated for that and then everything was different. School got easier.

Although Jailin shares with Adewale ideas regarding self-advocacy and racial differences between Black and White schools, what differs is that Jailin waits for an acknowledgement of his skills before advocating for himself whereas it was instilled in Adewale from a young age. Jailin offers a confirming narrative in the following quote,

She was the first teacher to really believe in me, I began to advocate for myself, so that was probably one of my biggest changes for myself. I take other people’s perception strongly, but I think those perceptions reinforce how you deal with yourself sometimes, so a large part of my life was listening to other people’s views of me letting that build on my own habits or views of my own strengths, and that influence I had to kind of dispel in my adult life, or look at more critically or constructively, I guess. So there’s some truth to how others perceive you and how you self-advocate, they have some connection, at least for me.

In addition to Jailin’s own realization of his academic identity, his experience led to another key component of Black male success, which is the weight of perception and expectation. Jailin’s experience highlights the importance of high expectations and the effects that high expectations can have on the success of a student and academic identity. In this
particular response, the teacher who believed in her student’s abilities challenged his beliefs about himself and enabled him to strive for more. Jailin might not have identified academic success as part of his identity until this teacher challenged Jailin by presenting him with high expectations. As shown in Jailin’s response, high expectations can yield positive results just as low expectations can yield a deficit in success.

Eric, another participant, discussed self-advocacy as being detrimental to his success. His father taught him self-advocate. As Eric illustrates in the following quote,

Because my parents said ‘You’re going to college.’ As a five year old, when people would ask you, because you’re all excited about you’re going to school in first grade – I went to first grade at five- when I would ask, ‘Oh, Eric…’ I was asked, ‘What school are you going to? What school are you going to?’ I was always responding, ‘I’m going to college. I’m going to college.’ That was my first response. I didn’t understand the difference between the levels and the grades. I just know that was what was expected and I advocated for it without even realizing it. I knew at a young age I was going to college, and it was instilled in me from day one. It was important because it was something that stuck in my head from the age of 5 all the way to the age of 16 when I was senior in high school, and when I graduated at 1, I knew I was going to college. I didn’t think I was going to be allowed out of the house if I didn’t go to college. Didn’t matter where, I was going to have higher education.

Eric’s father had high expectations and instilled self-advocacy however the cost of these expectations resulted in him interpreting high expectations and self-advocacy as detrimental to his success. In each of the participant’s view on self-advocacy they acknowledged that it is challenged by the beliefs of those who support just the opposite.
Racism. Embedded in the notion of self-advocacy, is an acknowledgement of the complexities of racism. While each participant defines racism using structural terms and examples, embedded within some of the narratives are interpersonal experiences of racially-motivated behavior. Table 2 included all participants’ definitions of racism.

Table 2: Definitions of racism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adewale</td>
<td>the use of power to systematically and institutionally oppressed people based on their race.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suncere</td>
<td>Racism is White Supremacy, when one ethnic group has the power to control and impose their ways to another in all areas: economics, education, entertainment, labor, law, politics, religion, sex and war. I don’t want people to think I’m racist. We are neither pro-Black nor anti-white. We are pro-righteousness and anti-devilishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>the institutional, personal and financial disenfranchisement of Black peoples and people of color. Anybody can say they have experienced parts of racism, i.e. prejudice and discrimination but when resources come into play and I am being denied resources because of the color of my skin, that’s racism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jailin</td>
<td>Racism is a systemic or structural problem within society that hinders one race or uplifts one race at the expense of another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>Because of the complexity of this phenomenon, I cannot provide a single definition</td>
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Adewale, for example, boldly states

I could argue that I’ve never faced ‘racism’. I’ve faced ignorance and bigotry, but not racism, based on my own definition because of the fact that my parents make a decent living for themselves to support my siblings and I. I went to private school, I am a smart
person, so I got the grades I needed, and you would have to go above and beyond to tarnish that because there’s physical evidence for that. I learned at a young age to advocate for myself and my parents taught me that. I earned that especially being around a large group of White kids, the ability to advocate for oneself. It was really hard to systematically or in an institutionalized manner to oppress me. In the bigger picture, ignorance and bigotry are under the umbrella of the common definition of racism so I learned to self-advocate before feeling the effects of racism.

Suncere lives by and continues to teach a life of Peace, Knowledge, Wisdom and Understanding, but acknowledges that his affiliation with this particular culture could lead others to believe he is racist. In contrast, how Suncere self identifies is very different than how the other participants in this study identify. Suncere’s reality is that many will see him as racist. Suncere states:

I do not profess to be an academician, however, I guess I’m Black and I have been formally educated (allegedly). Again when I graduated from high school I had to have Western Civilization covered. When I got to college…lo and behold… I had to take Western Civilization (again) as a prerequisite to graduation. There is absolutely no formal place of learning whereas I had to be reminded of the great contributions of the western world and how these contributions just made life so much better for the rest of the world. That is fine …we should applaud any contribution to the planet that betters the human condition. The problem is when your own contribution is meant to seem inconsequential (even erased) so as to protect the elevated status of your oppressor.

In this quote, Suncere brings in an historical background as well as institutional factors to the meaning behind his experiences.
Timbukto was a great center of learning for all of the ancient world...now it is a cast away term for some far away non-descript place (ex. Where did ya’ll go? Ans: I don’t know...we was somewhere in “Timbukto”). We as a people have been stripped of our history/accomplishments ...supplanted with a history fraught with deceptions and lies. A total gutting of history, family, language etc...to the point of making us feel inferior. Not only that but making us so insane as to like (some may even say love) the treatment of this oppressor (White Jesus, Santa Claus anyone??? Lol). Most of our people need an exorcist ...in that they need the demon that is the slave masters mindset lifted out of them. I paraphrase but I believe it was Malcom X who said ..“only a fool would allow their enemy to teach their children”. How are our children expected to excel when the system of education (at present) is basically designed to keep them mentally handicapped? White supremacy is the issue and it has been, and still is, the basis of western world power, politics, education etc. and is present in all aspects of American and European interactions.

Suncere also discusses another aspect of self-advocacy. While the other participants discuss self-advocacy for equal advantage and opportunity, Suncere discusses the inability to be equal because of Black’s Supreme existence. He questions the goal of self-advocacy but not its importance in proving our role as the mothers and fathers of civilization.

So self-advocacy is fine but advocate for what? We must be clear about what we are advocating for. Question what you are advocating for. So that we can have better opportunities to be “miseducated” so that we may better serve whom, the world or its so-called conquerors? The mindset must be attacked 1st. The mindset that says ...Egypt is not in Africa, manifest destiny is God’s will, etc...
Self-advocacy is necessary because we are raised in fear. Whites are raised to go get what they are owed while we [Black males] are taught not to make waves. We need to self advocate for proper education, education that covers our story not History. Education that does not put us in a second class citizen state. I mean 1+1 always will = 2, and the Sun will always be the center of our solar system (our ancestors knew that way [emphasized] before Copernicus)...but the process as to how we knew the information and how we used it is always shaded/tainted/hidden and that is a major part of the problem.

Kyle subtly debated whether self-advocacy was a contributing factor in the fight against racism, Kyle states,

For example, I have had counselors tell me to reconsider my academic choices and consider community colleges. I’m not knocking community colleges but the notion of me considering this option because I am not ‘good enough’, that you can’t see more for me because you’re being blinded by these racist glasses. This is why self-advocacy is so important. Self–advocacy empowers individuals. Self-advocacy is a huge thing. Just knowing when to say, ‘Hey, I deserve this. I’m good enough for this…’ In jobs, I didn’t even know you can negotiate pay. Little things like that. Those things contribute to you being a weak individual, not physically, but mentally. Those things perpetuate racism, the effects of it of just being considered a lower class citizen because you can’t advocate for yourself. You can’t tell people what you want. You can’t tell people what you need as a person, whether that be peace of mind, whether that be food, whether that be just asking for help. You don’t have too much. The only thing you have is your voice and your humanity. If you don’t self-advocate, you will lose it little by little.
Eric was not able to create a single definition of racism because of the complexity of the phenomenon. Eric made sense of his experiences with racism and how those experiences lead him on his path to success in the following ways. Eric says

In elementary school, in a Catholic parochial school that I was at, the kids would call me nigger and I would- I detest that word. God, I hate that word – and I would tell the teacher. Our community says, ‘Don’t snitch, right? I would tell the teacher, and they would say, ‘Just ignore him.’ I was a first grader when I first started hearing that. There were 3rd and 4th graders, ‘Little nigger boy. Nigger this. Nigger that. Little nigger boy, come here. Look at that nigger’s hair.’ Stuff like that.

Eric’s experiences like Jailin’s experiences with racism made him aware of how others perceived him and ultimately challenged the way he saw himself.

It changed me in that I felt that I had to carry and conduct myself a certain way in order to be accepted by the White community in which I was surrounded. I’d be in that all day and then I’d go home and be in a mixed environment and it was night and day. I think that carried forth through most of my life, even probably until today, where I carry myself a certain way so that I’m viewed as the same, not by just my skin color first.”

These participants are acknowledging the complexities of self-advocacy and racism however, it is not a linear understanding. Participants acknowledge the position of structural elements in racism but also included interpersonal experiences in their deeper explanations of racism in their lives.

**White Privilege is Not Just for Whites**

White privilege emerges from the many facets of racism. White privilege is defined as a set of benefits granted to Whites who dominate powerful positions in society. Participants
discussed what it means for Blacks to apply White Privilege for their own benefit. Participants described White Privilege as being a sense of entitlement not limited to just Whites but to any person who knows their self worth and advocates for it; the mindset of entitlement is just that, a mindset. White Privilege is perceived as something that society gives and some participants believe it can also be something that is taken, which challenges society’s position.

Jailin believes Black males should walk the same road of entitlement. Having the “willingness to be as free as possible despite getting implicit messages not to be. Just thinking as freely as possible and believing myself as much as I can despite the powers that be not wanting me to, you know, and recognizing that I can do anything that anybody else can do.” Jailin discussed the importance of privilege and entitlement being connected to self-identity. Jailin suggests that Black males understand how masculinity affects the way they look at things, how they deal with certain issues regarding race and how they respond to negative perceptions. He hypothesizes, Black males will succeed when they reach out and take advantage of resources, and live with the understanding that they are deserving.

Jailin shares,

My own experiences and not being understood and just noticing that a lot of the problems I think we have nationwide have to do with an issue with…I think there’s a lot of miscommunication and misunderstandings between identities and groups, especially between privileged and oppressed, and I think that can be, not necessarily resolved, but we could help that by having education build toward understanding those identities contextually, especially through historical significance or historical context of those identities, especially race, gender, sex, etc., so we can know how to talk to each other more. Because I think it’s not understanding each other or what goes into our experiences
that builds those extraordinary judgments and damaging relationships.

Contrary to Jailin, Suncere does not support the notion that “White Privilege is not just for Whites.” Suncere believes that no one is entitled to anything. As he explains,

White Privilege is a mindset, meaning, if I work hard for something, I can have reasonable expectations that I will achieve it or be successful in ‘whatever’ endeavor without fear of retribution…sort of a ‘will of God’…it’s a destined thing as opposed to being ‘lucky’ or fortunate. I’ll tell you a story. I had a gentleman who was a mentor to me in my early days. White. His father left the family and his mom had to move to the projects. He grew up with Black folk. His best friend (who was Black) ended up doing a long stretch for drugs. He himself dabbled and dabbled, classic tale, got lost in his product and he did not get his act together until about 30. You know what he told me? He knew that regardless of what he did in the past, all he had to do was get right and focused and he would have a chance because he was White. I mean everyone should have the right to succeed or fail based on their drive, ambition and talent. I legally carry a weapon in my state, not openly for two reasons: 1) because I don’t want to broadcast that and 2) even though I know it is my right to do so, I know I would be challenged and mayhaps even have to deal with something far worse. White men openly carry their weapons here everyday without a second thought. That is White Privilege.

Suncere does not give credence to the idea that Blacks have the same privilege as Whites simply because Blacks self-advocate for it. Because Blacks are people of color, society will not “give” privilege and it is not something Blacks can “take.” Until society recognizes and acknowledges its unjustifiable power to appoint White Privilege to Whites, the privilege of entitlement lies in the destruction of the same society that supports it.
Conversely Kyle spoke of his experience of privilege. Kyle was raised as a first generation American, his outlook on privilege and entitlement are different. Kyle’s understanding of White Privilege is not one that affects him personally. According to his experience and being raised by a West Indian father, Kyle has the opportunity to take advantage of all resources. Coming to this country as an immigrant as opposed to a slave sets a different mentality on a Black male. Kyle explains,

My dad is way different…He exemplifies a lot that I see out of West Indian males coming over here. African- American males tend to have a victimized mindset. I tend to have that sometimes. Like, ‘Oh damn, this is just happening to me or this is just happening to us because we’re Black males and this is the stereotype.’ Whereas, my dad came from a primarily Black Island or country, his thoughts are different. He came over thinking the world was his. Being a Black male, you have to go into slavery and the effects of slavery and what that has on the mind.

Contrasting the West Indian and American identities, Kyle asserts that Black Americans begin from place of victimization given the American history of slavery. In contrast, West Indians share a common starting point and, as a result, privilege. As Kyle explains in the following quote, this differential starting point leads to alternative choice options.

Obviously, Caribbean’s have to go into that too because that’s part of their culture but we are not taught that [slave mentality] at an early age, being raised on a primarily Black island. Being born on a predominantly Black island or country we don’t have that basis. Caribbean’s were, I like to say, born and raised in the village, whereas a lot of us Americans were not. So we are born into the negativity whether it be because of media, what we see or whether that be because we don’t have a lot of Black role models…Black
male role models…African-American male role models are not alive. It’s hard.

Kyle does not look to compare his opportunities to those of Whites. His belief is that racism exists but so do opportunity and resources to be taken advantage of as a means to success by those who recognize the opportunities and resources.

**Vision Creates Reality**

This theme explains the discontinuity between participant’s reality and their vision for themselves. For example, Suncere explains his home and the community as “the hood,” which led others to envision Suncere as a victim of his environment. In stark contrast, Suncere says:

In the hood, ‘you either sold drugs or had a wicked jump shot (that’s a Biggie Smalls verse),’ he smiled. I grew up with my mom and dad in the home. Both my mom and dad were great influences. I knew the only way out of the hood was to get an education. I grew up knowing that failure was not an option and that anyone who actively and diligently pursued understanding would be successful. In my house a hard earned C over an easy A was valued.

Suncere’s parents raised him with a vision of success. His parents raised him with the vision that as the “original man” there was no other option. It was stressed that education, even the miseducation, is something that cannot be taken away. Suncere quips “Knowledge is infinite” and so are Suncere’s visions of possibilities.

At a young age, Eric’s parents pushed the ideals and vision of higher education. It was because of his parents that Eric persisted. The expectation was set that Eric would attend college, graduate and be successful. The family pushed academics and Eric pushed himself athletically. Eric explained that football was a passion, a love. Eric did not attend college on an athletic scholarship. Eric sees athletic scholarships as problematic.
It’s problematic because many of the student athletes that go to the colleges and universities to play sports don’t finish their degree when their athletic eligibility ends. So, many are left with an incomplete academic resume, if you will, with X amount of credits left to attain their degree. Many don’t have the resources to finish. Many don’t have enough of the right classes or grades to continue on, either at the university in which they displayed their athletic achievement at, or any other local university. At the same time, many will major in what I would say are undervalued degrees such as Communications, General Studies and you’ll see a lot of undeclared, which I don’t know, but if you’re in your third or fourth year of playing…You should have a declared degree.

Conclusion

The four themes above can be further explained into a comprehensive description that reveals the structure of the lived experiences of successful Black males who negotiate and persist through institutional racism in higher education institutions. Essentially, all five respondents experienced and persisted through institutional racism throughout their academic careers in higher education, but the reasons for which they persist all vary. Participants interpreted their experiences with persistence as a natural reaction given the expectations set in place as early as they can remember. For all, at an early age the vision of being a successful Black male was set in their minds. The participants indicate that the common thread of awareness for self-identity and advocacy is imperative for success. Given the expectations placed upon each participant by family members, teachers, role models and in 4 out of the 5 cases, by society, the responsibility of success is not taken lightly.

Some participants described feeling alone on college campuses, even with other successful Black male students. All participants described feeling “too Black” at some points on
campus and in two cases participants have felt “not Black enough.” Self-identifying as a Black male to other Black males on campus can be difficult when demographically one does not share the same community or family experiences, resulting in not feeling “Black enough.” While trying to fit in on a predominantly White college campus with a lack of exposure to other cultural norms could leave other Black males feeling “too Black.” In their communities, 3 out of the 5 participants discussed taking on a “raceless” identity just to assimilate to the culture surrounding where they reside. On campus, at times, many have sought a “raceless” identity that didn’t draw attention - negative or positive - from their White counterparts for fear of having their own actions be the representative of a whole race. How Black males are perceived through the media, through predominantly White college campuses and through the observations of their peers and family members alone are multifaceted. In the next chapter, the findings’ significance relative to the research questions will be discussed.
Chapter V: Summary, Discussion, and Implications

Introduction

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis study was to examine the lived experiences of successful Black males in higher education who have persisted through institutional racism. The successful Black males of this study used various strategies to ensure their success. This chapter examines how the researcher’s findings contribute to existing literature and conversations of critical race theory and social identity theory while reflecting on the meaningful experiences of the participants. This chapter also illustrates the connections between understanding knowledge of self, social identity and the importance of self-efficacy and self-advocacy when implementing a “White Privilege mindset.” The researcher also challenges the deficit mindset applied to Black males in higher education. The remainder of chapter 5 notes the implications for practice, limitations and possible ideas for future research.

Discussion of Findings in Relationship to the Literature

This section discusses the findings of this study in relationship to the literature presented in chapters 1 and 2. In chapters 1 and 2, the researcher presented the body of literature that describes major areas of research including: deficit view, institutional racism, racial problems within the educational system, microaggressions, and racelessness. The focus of this research was to challenge the deficit view with an anti-deficit view. The findings of this study support the deficit view of institutional racism through the shared experiences of the participants. Participants in this doctoral thesis have experienced in their academic careers low teacher expectations, microaggressive behaviors, and racial problems in the educational system. In contrast, White privilege being used by Black males as a catalyst to success is a new concept that has not been discussed in the literature. Furthermore, self-advocacy that is rooted in the concept
Experiences with institutionalized racism. The Black male participants in this study each encountered experiences with institutionalized racism. For example, each of the participants experienced to some degree of low expectations, microaggressions, and stereotypes. These findings are consistent with the literature. For example the microaggressions that Eric reports in his educational experience shaped how he saw himself and how he acted in educational contexts. Thus similar to Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin’s (2007) findings about microaggressions and education as well as Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and Fegan (2006) about Black students experiences in school settings, the findings from this study echo the harms that Black males face in institutionally racist environments.

Experiences with overcoming institutionalized racism. Although each participant experienced institutionalized racism, each employed slightly different strategies for overcoming these structures. For example, Suncere and Eric have completed their higher education academic experience and have gone on to work successfully in a corporate environment. Jailin, Kyle and Adewale are persisting through their higher education experiences and are each part of social and cultural clubs where they are spreading awareness and teaching other Black males how to advocate for themselves. The research has been silent about strategies for Black males to persist through academic environments successfully. The notion that Black men must assimilate or assume raceless identities as Fordham (1988, 1986) corroborates that this raceless identity in pursuance of academic success is consistent with society’s expectations even today. Conversely, Adewale uses White privilege as a platform to advocate for himself and his educational needs. This is unique because the literature is replete with White privilege being used as a strategy for non-White populations’ success.
Discussion of Findings in Relationship to Theory

The social identities of Black males influence their behaviors, perceptions and attitudes toward academic achievement. Social identity theory gave the researcher a guided lens for probing questions with participants. The participants in this doctoral thesis categorized themselves as successful Black males. Categorization allowed these participants to compare themselves against others like them and identify appropriate behaviors by using these “group norms” as a standard of measurement. By using this type of measurement, participants are held accountable for his own success and are not socially comparing themselves to other groups which could result in low self-esteem and a feeling of inferiority. The results of these participants enacted White privilege as a means to their success. In contrast, Suncere, who does not concede to the White privilege for Black males concept, socially identifies as a supreme being, God. He socially identifies as a member of the 5% Nation of Islam. His ideology is being Black is the ultimate privilege and having knowledge of oneself is how privilege is enabled. This next section discusses the findings of this study in relationship to the theoretical framework presented in chapter 1 and also incorporates a discussion about how the critical race theory can also be used to make sense of the participants’ experiences.

Themes mapping onto social identity. The themes map closely onto the concepts that make up social identity theory. For example, self esteem is embedded within each theme in that knowledge of self and history serves as a foundation for self-esteem and the potential academic achievements in one’s future. Similarly self-esteem is necessary for using White Privilege, constructing an academic vision of oneself, and advocacy for one’s academic needs. Self perception is embedded in knowing Black history, who you are, and where you come from. It is also embedded in self advocacy. In order to advocate for oneself, one must have a vision. Pride
is connected to using the mindset of White privilege and entitlement, having knowledge of your history and your future. The four themes of having knowledge of self and history, Self advocacy, White privilege not being just for Whites and Vision creating reality express participants’ social identity configurations and can benefit from further analysis using critical race theory.

**Critical race theory.** Although social identity theory is useful in making sense of the experiences of the Black males with their social identity, it is incomplete in fully making sense of the themes that emerged in understanding how these men have successfully negotiated systemic, academic, institutional oppression. Therefore, this next section uses critical race theory as an additional construct to help make sense of the findings that emerged from this study.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in the 1970’s with the early works of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, both of whom were frustrated with law and legal studies, due to the lack of progress with issues regarding civil rights and political reform (Taylor, 1998). Bell and other scholars in the critical race theory movement (Tate, 1997) challenged the legal structures regarding the patterns of race in the American legal system. Prolific scholar, Richard Delgado argued that using the voices of scholars of color to formulate narratives and rich discussion with respect to essential racial problems laid the foundation for social reform (Tate, 1997). Another scholar, Solorzano (1998) describes CRT as one that “challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (p. 122). Critical race theory challenges deficit informed research that continues to marginalize the experiences of people of color, gender and class issues (Banks & Hughes, 2013).

Critical race theory scholarship widely agrees upon 5 major tenants (Ladson-Billings
This theory critiques social structures and each tenet serves a different purpose in analyzing the data from this study.

**Tenet 1: The centrality of race and racism in society.** Racism is a normal standard in American society and because it is embedded within our social order, it appears both natural and normal to people living in this culture (Delgado, 1995).

**Tenet 2: The challenge to dominant ideology.** Critical race theory challenges the educational system regarding “color blindness,” race neutrality, and objectivity. Critical race theory researchers assert that these claims promote the power and privileges of the dominant culture.

**Tenet 3: The commitment to social justice –** critical race theory is committed to empowering subordinate groups. One of the racial and social justice objectives of CRT research strives to eliminate inequality with reference to racism, poverty and sexism. Educational institutions are systematic and contradictory in that they operate under a system that simultaneously marginalizes and oppresses while they also liberate and empower. Legal scholar, Derrick Bell explains that the concept of “interest convergence” is when legal reform occurs on behalf of marginalized groups only when their interests converge with those of White people (Driver, 2011). Both oppression and discrimination come with great resistance therefore CRT researchers posit that a strong commitment to social justice is one of the specific characteristics of transformational resistance.

**Tenet 4: The centrality of experiential knowledge.** A CRT framework acknowledges the experiences of students as legitimate and critical to the understanding of racial subordination in education. Using the life stories, family histories, and narratives of students of color assists researchers in analyzing and teaching about racial subordination in the academic field.
Tenet 5: The interdisciplinary perspective. Critical race theory analyzes race and racism in education by examining what has happened historically and what is happening presently as well as using different branches of knowledge.

There is also intersectionality. This principle emphasizes the multidimensionality of oppression and that disempowerment of people of color is not solely on account of racism (Ladson – Billings, 1998).

Using all five tenets of the critical race theory, researchers can then postulate “the ways in which educational structures, processes, and discourses support and promote racial subordination” (Solorazano, Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 315). This study used resistance, in particular, as a theoretical construct. Resistance theories “demonstrate how individuals negotiate and struggle with structures and create meanings of their own from these interactions” (Solorazano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 315). Resistance as a construct will help demonstrate how Black males react, perceive, conform, transform, and resist their social and educational experiences. In addition to the critical race theory, social identity theory provided insight into Black males’ self-perception and how this perception helps academically and socially circumnavigates educational environments thus eventually leading to success.

White privilege as controversy. White privilege as often taught does not apply to any other race. As Peggy McIntosh describes, there are certain privileges that Whites can rely on, entitlement being one of them. The entitlement that encompasses White privilege assists in the institutional racism that Black males experience in their academic careers. Critical race theory’s Tenet 1: The centrality of race and racism in society is prominent in this finding. This tenet deepens the understanding that racism is a normal standard and embedded in our social order. The ideology that Whites have not only more advantages but various opportunities offered to
them because of the lack of melanin in their skin aligns with the mindset that inequality, because of race, is normal in this culture. The implementation of the White Privilege mindset by Black males incorporates understanding knowledge of self and their history, social identity, self-advocacy and self-efficacy. These are the keys to success for the participants in this study and possibly for other Black males with a desire to succeed academically and socially.

The ability to persist through a higher education institution with the burden of racial microaggressions, discrimination, and prejudice on their backs, these Black males carry this and have negotiated their own successes. The experiences of the Black males interviewed for this study magnify the importance of a strong support system, a growth mindset and cultural academia. Jailin shared that he believes Blacks should have the same privileges as Whites and Kyle recognizes White privilege but does not inhibit his academic progress. These dynamics of White privilege in the lives of Black males need further investigation.

In Chapter 2, the researcher expounds on A. Wade Boykin’s view of the triple quandary bi-cultural experience. Each of the narratives of the Black males in this study corroborates Boykin’s hypothesis and highlights three experiences: (1) The Mainstream Experience where the participants’ experienced shared goals, rules, and values of the dominant culture, assimilation; (2) The Minority Experience where Blacks are exposed to oppressive conditions that placed them in the “out-group” of society, communities and schools; and, (3) The Black Cultural Experience which includes a “cultural crossover” of assimilating into the mainstream White experience internalizing cultural values. These experiences assist Black males with the self-deprecating ideology of inferiority. Boykin discusses this bi-cultural experience, when in reality this experience is mono-cultural in that the presentation of skin color, Black or Brown skin, supersedes all other identifications. For example, Kyle discusses his identification as Caribbean
Black, which is in stark contrast to the other respondents in the group. Kyle’s cultural background is West Indian. His parents were raised on a predominantly Black island where Black privilege exists. His parents were raised in an environment where the negative connotations of African American Blacks did not exist. At the time of the parents’ migration, they viewed the United States as the land of opportunity. Kyle was raised with the mindset and the connotation that Black males can succeed academically and socially.

Suncere does not support Boykin’s hypothesis of the three experiences but does acknowledge the Black Cultural Experience. Suncere’s social location requires him to project a cross-cultural assimilation and act as if he’s being “bi-cultural.” This act enables him to be successful with both the oppressed and the oppressor. Suncere’s complexity, which is simplified throughout this study, requires an alternative lens that re-conceptualizes the theories used in this study into what can be termed “a critical social race identity.” This critical social race theory would frame his historical belief that he is God, A Supreme Being, and in charge of his own destiny. This mindset differs from the other participants in this study because they were not raised with the knowledge of the 5% Nation of Islam. The dynamic ideologies Suncere holds give voice to Tenets 4 and 5 of the critical race theory. Suncere is able to share life stories, family history and analyze race and racism in education using various branches of knowledge.

*Challenging the ideology embedded in Black male academic success.* There are two strands of research that were discussed in the literature review: Critical Race Theory and Black Male Academics. Critical race theory focuses on “challeng[ing] the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (Solorzano, 1998, p. 122). Within this discussion of critical race theory, scholars have developed another dominant discourse based on
the limited focus on culture. For example, critical race theorists contend that Whites live with privileges only allotted to them. Most of the participants in this study have adopted the mindset of White privilege and are using this to advance their academic careers. While challenging the second tenet of critical race theory, “color blindness” and race neutrality, these participants who are exercising the concept of White privilege as a passage to success are modifying their behaviors, perceptions and attitudes. The self-advocacy these participants exhibit precipitates conscious effort toward success. Their social identities are impacted by their academic careers. While these participants are pre-judged according to the melanin in their skin, their social presentation has changed. There are Blacks who are oppressed, there are White oppressors, and there are Blacks who utilize a White privilege mindset to become academically and socially flexible. Suncere and Kyle would both agree that this mindset is common amongst those Black males who have knowledge of self and acknowledge the dichotomy between White privilege and White acceptance. It could be that White academia categorizes Black males as the “athlete-student,” the “economically disadvantaged” student or the “willing to assimilate scholar”. The participants in this study do not consent to these identities and enact an alternative – “Blacks who use White privilege to their academic and social advantage.”

*Implications of this new identity.* This new identity can be fostered through Black educators. Black educators can explicitly expose Black students to the tacit connection that all Black people share in educational settings. These discussions include but are not limited to the expectations and perceptions that others have of Black students, the role of entitlement in academic success and how to use White privilege as a tool for Black student success. In this researcher’s educational experience some educators cannot fathom the continuing challenge of racism that deters Black males from academic success. As a single mom of two Black boys, I
mentor both sons. I have imparted knowledge of themselves and of their history. I have demonstrated what using White privilege looks like in an academic setting and I am molding my sons to look beyond the athlete-student identity toward the identity of Blacks who use White privilege to their academic and social advantage. Similar to Kyle, I am of West Indian heritage and have been raised with the mindset of infinite opportunity. White educators can learn about the complexities of Black male academic and social identities. This learning about Black male academic and social identity requires White teachers to move beyond understanding racism, the deficit macro level view of Black male academics, and their own construction of their privilege in educational sites. Focusing on the complexities of Black male academic and social identity requires White teachers to understand their role in shaping Black males’ identities as well as their future trajectories as scholars.

No one is going to give you the education you need to overthrow them.

~Assata Shakur

**Implications for Practice**

The purpose of this doctoral study is not to provide a roadmap for what institutions can do to solve institutional racism against Black males. Conversely, it is a study that raises awareness of the problem of practice and a roadmap for Black males who aspire academic and social success. It is important to note that institutions with both blatant and subtle cases of racism can begin to examine these injustices and commit to more equality and excellence in their classrooms and on their campuses. Their practices may begin with, but is not limited to, the following recommendations: Policy makers, administrators, educators, and other stakeholders need to move beyond Black history month as a time to talk about the success of Black people.
Institutions with special education educators need to reorient their mindset for Black males in special education. It is important for institutions of learning to be cognizant of the percentage of Black males being suspended, retained, and placed in alternative schools. It is vital to identify this as a problem and find the root of its existence. Institutions of higher education must push for more parent involvement. All stakeholders must not hide behind the mask of White privilege and correct their differential treatment. Educators must give a clear understanding of purposeful learning and explain how this learning will prepare all students for college and career readiness. We must challenge our Black males with rigorous instructional strategies. Particularly predominantly White institutions need to be cognizant of the cultural biases presented in standardized testing; These tests are essentially litmus tests for Black success. The consistent research studies published about the lack of Black male success without a guide as to how to be successful will not contribute to the success or the desired success of Black males. Institutions need to discuss the strengths and challenges of success for Black males in order to increase the number of those who are academically successful.

A larger, more intractable problem is institutional racism in higher education. Because there is no standard measurement of cultural competence, institutions of higher education cannot mark their success. With that said, institutions of higher education can mark their success with graduation rates of Black males within the 4 year time frame, while also identifying how many of these students achieve graduation outside of athletic programs. These Black male graduation rates can be published on university websites so that Black males considering a particular university can judge the opportunities for their academic success.

Areas for Future Research

Using the findings of this study with a larger sample to extend the results can extend this
research. With this larger sample, the researcher can test the concepts of White Privilege being used by Blacks for academic achievement, knowledge of self and history, and vision creating reality. Expanding our understanding of these concepts can be used in early elementary grades to propel Black male academic achievement. These studies might expand the works of Dr. Shaun R. Harper and further examine how Black males negotiate and transcend academic, social, cultural and economic barriers that undermine their achievement.

With the understanding of knowledge of self and history in mind, educators and their disciplines can explicitly select prominent Black males who have succeeded academically as “vision boards” of up and coming Black students. The researcher posits that change will occur in the process of raising the consciousness of educators, policy makers, and other academic stakeholders regarding the way Black male achievement is currently viewed. Using the tenets of critical race theory, including the principle of intersectionality, storytelling, and counter narratives, researchers are given the opportunity to explore theoretical and conceptual issues regarding race, racism self identity and factors that contribute to Black male academic and social success. More anti-deficit research is also needed to combat deficit research about the academic and social outcomes of Black males.

The complexities of Black males’ academic and social experiences are unique to every individual; however the insights of every individual are the best sources to analyze for solutions. The common thread lies in the implications of having Black or Brown skin. There is a variation in melanin amongst Blacks. Given this current research study, an area for additional research could include the effects of institutional racism on specific cultural different Black males, i.e. African American Black males, West Indian Black males, and Black males who identify as the “Original Man.” Another area of research for exploration is how various skin tones yield
different academic and social acceptance as well as its positive and negative impact on academic and social advancement.

Limitations

A distinct limitation to this study was the small sample size of participants. With a larger sample size, the researcher could have collected more data and discovered additional variations on the themes presented. Out of the 15 possible participants who demonstrated interest in this study, only 5 (33%) of all interested fulfilled all academic and social requirements.

This study’s limited range of questions asked by the researcher also affects its applicability to other situations. The scope of questions asked was broad and often led to broad answers. Although the researcher probed further, more focused questions could have gathered more in-depth explanations into how institutional racism might have affected respondents’ feelings of academic or social inferiority.

Additionally, the variation of experiences with Black males who persist through institutional racism would be greater if the researcher expanded the study into Historically Black Colleges and Universities. A paradigmatic change occurs when studying internalized racism because internalized racism, for the purpose of this study, is defined as racism against one’s own race. Through this lens, the research would broaden this study and address how internalized racism affects self-acceptance, behaviors, perceptions, and attitudes toward academic achievement.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand the meaningful experiences of successful Black males in higher education who have persisted through institutional racism. There is a significant body of research that focuses on Black male underachievement and educational failures. This one-sided
emphasis on the educational crisis of Black males does not offer insight into those Black males who circumnavigate through the system successfully. Conversely, little research offers an anti-deficit view on Black males’ achievement. Black males are not told how to circumnavigate institutional racism to attain academic achievement. Black males are not given instructions on how to transcend the barriers that undermine their success. It was important for the researcher to understand how Black males make sense of the negative perceptions portrayed through academic data, social identity labels, media, stereotypes, and microaggressions.

This study yielded four themes that derived from several of the meaningful experiences of the participants. These themes are strategic in their contributions to a successful mindset and assisting Black male academic and social success. The new identity of “Blacks who use White Privilege to their academic advantage” incorporates so many other messages as to whether or not this is a clever way to promote positive academic and social mindsets for Black males or just a variation of assimilation.
References


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Appendix A
Request for permission to conduct research

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Natasha Halfkenny and I am a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University in the College of Professional Studies Program. I am writing to respectfully request permission to conduct a qualitative research study on the NEU Boston campus site.

As you may know, Black males are in a state of educational crisis is based on Black males’ low high school graduation rates, low college enrollment, low college completion rates, and higher likelihood to leave college before degree completion. My study will conduct research from an anti-deficit view on the successful Black males that have attended and are current students of NEU and how they make sense of their lived experiences regarding institutional racism and self identity on and off campus.

As a current student of Northeastern University and undergraduate alumna, I am fortunate to have the opportunity to address this crisis by conducting research on identifying how institutional racism and self-identity contributes to the level of academic success for Black males. It is my aspiration that this research will provide the practical knowledge to help school leaders diminish the devastating effects of institutional racism and promote equality and excellence in our Higher Ed. Institutions.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Please contact me by email at Mclennn.n@husky.neu.edu or by phone 617 594-2606.

Sincerely,

Natasha Halfkenny
Appendix B
Letter to Participants

Dear Interviewee:

My name is Natasha Halfkenny and I am a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University in the College of Professional Studies Program. I am writing to express my interest and enthusiasm in having a Black male from your organization participate in my doctoral research study. Please do not feel pressured at anytime to participate.

As you may know, Black males are in a state of educational crisis is based on Black males’ low high school graduation rates, low college enrollment, low college completion rates, and higher likelihood to leave college before degree completion.

As a student of Northeastern University, I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to address this crisis by conducting research on identifying how institutional racism and self identity contributes to the level of academic success for Black males. It is my aspiration that this research will provide the practical knowledge to help school leaders diminish the devastating effects of institutional racism and promote equality and excellence in our Higher Ed. institutions. You have worked extremely hard in your academic careers thus far. You have been accepted to a highly competitive college. Your enrollment at NEU or those who have graduated, demonstrates your commitment to academic success. This research study will assist other Black males who have similar experiences to yours as a Black male on a predominantly White campus.

It is my belief that educators, such as myself, can learn from you. As such, I would like to ask for your participation in my research study. Participation is entirely voluntary. However, if you decide to participate in this research study, you will take part in three interviews that will last approximately 40 minutes. All information gathered in the interview will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to keep your identity anonymous.
During the interview, I will ask you several questions pertaining to your lived experience as a student. The goal of this study is to uncover factors that have contributed to your academic success. Please keep in mind that at any time before, during or after the interview you can opt out of the study. If you would like to participate, please contact me by email at Mclennan.n@husky.neu.edu or by phone at (617) 594-2606 and I will forward you a letter of consent to begin the interviewing process.

Thank you, for your consideration and if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by email or phone.

Sincerely,

Natasha Halfkenny
Appendix C

Informed Consent Questions

Informed Consent Questions Form

Interviewee Name: _______________________________________
Interviewer: _______________________________________
Date: _______________________________________
Location of Interview: _______________________________________

Prefatory Statement: I would like to gather some background information about you in your own words. To do this, I am going to ask you some questions about some key experiences you encountered growing up during your K-12 grade years. Your responses may include both academic and non-academic elements as appropriate.

Informed Consent Questions:

1. Where did you grow up?
2. Can you please describe your community?
3. Who raised you?
4. How old were your parents when they had you?
5. Were your parents married? If so, are they still married?
6. What is the highest level of education your parent(s) have completed?
7. What do your parents do for a living?
8. Describe your relationship with each parent.
9. Did you have any positive Black male role models during your K-12 academic years?
10. To what extent was the curriculum you experienced in your K-12 setting, if any, was culturally proficient? Please give examples.
11. What year are you graduating or did you graduate?
12. What are you currently studying or did you study?
13. What are three words you would use to describe yourself? Explain.
14. What are three words that have been used to describe you? Do you agree with these perceptions? Why or why not?
15. How do you define racism?
Prefatory Statement: I would like to hear about your experiences in your own words. To do this, I am going to ask you some questions about the key experiences you encountered during your time as a student at a local University you are currently attending or have attended. Your responses may include both academic and non-academic elements as appropriate.

Interview Questions:
1. Please describe a time you have experienced racism.
2. What are some values that were instilled in you at a young age regarding being a young Black male? Please explain.
3. Describe one educational experience (negative or positive) throughout your K-12 experience that motivated you to be a better you.
4. What, if any, specific experiences in grades K-12 helped the development of your identity as a member of your racial and ethnic group?
5. What attributes do you feel denote you as a successful Black male?
6. Is there a difference between your perception of yourself and how others perceive you? If so, what are the differences? If not, how do you know?
7. How were the ambitions for a college education cultivated? Who were your strongest influences?
8. How do you define academic success?
9. Are you familiar with any negative stereotypes of Black males in education?
   a. If so, how do you craft productive responses to these stereotypes?
10. How have your experiences with Black male stereotypes impacted your success?
11. Has there been any learning opportunity to prepare you to diminish the negative stereotypes?
12. Please describe why you think some of your Black male counterparts are successful and others are not?
13. Can you describe how your involvement with your social, cultural or athletic group has had a positive effect on your success?
14. How did/do you negotiate balance between academic achievement and peer acceptance?
15. Which programs and experiences at your university enhance Black male student readiness for positive college experiences?
16. Can you describe an experience in college that assisted in the development and/or support of pursuing a degree beyond a baccalaureate or an experience that will help you compete successfully for the career of your choosing?
17. How can the educational system and/or educators better support the achievement of all Black males? What could school systems do differently?
18. Black males face many complex adversities; can you tell me what do you contribute to your persistence?

19. Once you achieve(d) your degree, how is the trajectory of success continued?

20. If you could offer advice to young Black males about becoming successful, what would your advice be?

Ask participant if they have any questions and thank them for their participation.
Appendix E
Consent Form

Northeastern University, Ed.D. Educational Leadership (Higher Education)

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Kelly Conn, Natasha Halfkenny

Title of Project: Through the Eyes of Successful Black Males

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study:
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researchers will explain to you in further detail the purpose of the project and your participation. Please feel free to ask any questions to address any concerns you may have. At your earliest convenience, please let me know if you plan to participate or not. If you decide to participate and before the interview can commence you will be required to sign the consent form in person.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You were selected to take part in this research study because you have self-identified as a successful Black male.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research is to explore, through Black males’ voices, an anti-deficit view of the factors that lead to academic success. It will be in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Education Degree for Natasha Halfkenny.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this research study, you will take part in an interview that will last for approximately 40 minutes. During this time, there will be several questions that seek to understand your lived experiences and key factors that have contributed to your success. Your responses may include both academic and non-academic elements as appropriate. If time begins to run short, I may ask you to stay longer as it may be necessary in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. After the interview Natasha Halfkenny along with the help of Rev.com, will transcribe each interview. A second consultation (approx. 40 mins.) will take place to review your interview transcript to proofread for accuracy.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
You will be interviewed in a confidential location at a time of your choice at your earliest convenience.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
You will not experience any risk or discomfort as a participant in this research study. If you experience any discomfort describing your lived experiences, you may opt out of the study at any time.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
You will not receive any benefits for participating in this research study. However, your responses to the research questions will assist in unearthing key factors and additional supports that lead to academic success for African American males in public education.

**Who will see the information about me?**
All interview transcripts and notes taken will be kept in a secure, passcode safe computer located at the researcher’s home. The principal investigator Dr. Kelly Conn and the researchers will be the only people privy to and have access to the data gathered. After you proofread the interview transcript for accuracy and at the conclusion of the study all data will be destroyed. The consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years. Please note pseudonyms will be used to ensure your identity is kept anonymous. In rare cases, an authorized person or people from the Northeastern University Review Board may request to see the data to ensure the research is being done properly. If so, I will communicate this to you.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**
If you suffer any harm as a result of this research no special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of your participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**
At any time you are welcome to remove yourself from participating in this research study. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question at anytime.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Natasha Halfkenny by telephone at (617) 594-2606, or by email: mclennan.n@husky.neu.edu You can also contact Dr. Kelly Conn by email: k.conn@neu.edu, the Principal Investigator.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact: Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel. (617) 373-4588 | Fax. (617) 373-6600 | Email: n.regina@neu.edu

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
You will receive a small compensatory gift card for your travel and time.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
There is no monetary cost to participate in this research study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**
At anytime you can opt out of the study.

*If you decide to participate in this research study please complete the consent form*