

2019

# African American Males' Perception of the Barriers in Higher Education

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Terry Grant

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Walden University  
2019

Abstract

African American Males' Perception of the Barriers in Higher Education

by

Terry Grant

MA, Liberty University, 2013

BS, University of Maryland University College 2012

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

August 2019

## Abstract

Individuals who earn a college degree increase their chances of stable employment and decrease their chances of committing crimes. Fewer African American males earn college degrees compared to European American, Asian American, and Hispanic American males. The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore how barriers to education are developed, affect the education of African American males, and how those perceived barriers may be overcome. This study was framed by 2 theories: Steele and Aronson's stereotype threat and McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, and Lowell's achievement motivation. The six participants for this study were male college graduates who self-identified as African American. The participants were recruited through social media and referrals. An invitation to participate was posted to social media sites LinkedIn and Facebook. Participants were asked to respond to the social media invitation and complete a Survey Monkey questionnaire. The participants were selected based on two indicators; the geographic location between Beaufort South Carolina and Jacksonville Florida and having a college graduation date within the past 2 years. The participants revealed barriers of focus, disability, family schedule, and disability. The African American males who participated in this study used support systems of family, classmates, and the university faculty and staff to overcome their barriers. The findings from this study may provide educators, students, and parents with information on the barriers to higher education for African American males and some of the strategies used to overcome them.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Stewart and Irene Grant. Their commitment to education was a significant role model for me. I strive to make them proud and will use the information gained from this project to spread the importance of education.

## Acknowledgments

I want to give thanks to God for giving me the resilience and discipline to complete this important project and for blessing me with Walden University as a tool to gain the knowledge to understand the importance of social change. I want to thank the faculty and staff of Walden University for challenging me to think critically about the issues that are important to me and to society. I want to thank my chair, Dr. Mary Bold, for her guidance, wisdom and patience and for keeping me motivated to complete this project. I want to thank the library staff for their prompt response and assistance in helping with the research necessary to gain insight into this important topic. Some special thanks to my fellow classmates who kept me motivated by sharing tips and strategies to help me through the stressful times. I want to thank my wife, Lisa, for her love and support through this journey. Her encouragement helped me to understand that this dissertation is more than just a paper to complete a course but a project that could change the family dynamics for many students. Special thanks go out to my sister, Dr. Paulette Grant Bragg. Her advice on the procedures of the dissertation process helped to make it possible for me to accept the criticism that comes with the dissertation process. Lastly, I want to thank my children, Terry Jr. and Jessica, grandchildren, Amari and Eva, and son-in-law, Damen, for their encouragement and motivation. Everything that I do is with them in mind. I pray that this accomplishment will be a model for them to emulate.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	4
Purpose.....	5
Research Questions.....	6
Nature of the Study.....	6
Definition of Terms.....	7
Significance.....	9
Framework.....	11
Assumptions.....	12
Scope and Delimitations.....	12
Limitations.....	12
Implications for Social Change.....	13
Summary.....	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	15
Introduction.....	15
Theoretical Framework.....	17
Prevalence of Barriers.....	19
Risk Factors.....	21



Conditions Affecting Graduation Rates.....	23
Education Interventions .....	24
Mentoring Interventions.....	27
Qualitative Approach .....	28
Family Dynamics .....	29
Perception of Self-Efficacy.....	31
Community Factors.....	34
Summary .....	35
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	37
Introduction.....	37
Rationale for Case Study Research.....	38
Case Study Research Approach .....	39
Role of the Researcher .....	41
Research Design.....	42
<i>Figure 1. Research process flowchart.....</i>	44
Data Collection .....	45
Ethical Considerations .....	47
Data Analysis .....	48
Summary.....	50
Chapter 4 Results .....	51
Introduction.....	51
Research Questions.....	51

Procedure .....	52
Setting	52
Demographics .....	53
Table 1 .....	54
<i>Summary of Study Participants</i> .....	54
Data Collection .....	55
Data Analysis .....	56
Theme 1: Barriers .....	57
Family Schedule.....	57
Disability.....	58
Class Modality .....	58
Focus	59
Theme 2: Support System.....	59
Father	60
Spouse	60
Faculty and Staff.....	61
Theme 3: Resilience.....	62
Never Considered Withdrawal.....	62
Considered Withdrawal .....	63
Withdrew.....	64
Theme 4: Motivation.....	65
Family	65

Self-motivation .....	65
Theme 5: Funding.....	66
Theme 6: Preparation for College.....	67
Theme 7: Racial Issues .....	68
Theme 8: First Generation College Graduate .....	69
Summary .....	70
Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations .....	72
Introduction.....	72
Interpretation of the Findings.....	72
Barriers to Earning a Degree.....	73
Table 2 .....	74
<i>Summary of Strategies for Success</i> .....	74
Support Systems.....	75
Resilience .....	75
Motivation.....	76
Funding for College .....	77
College Preparation.....	78
Limitations of the Study.....	78
Recommendations.....	79
Administration Student Support .....	79
Strategies for Success .....	81
Future Research .....	82

Participants' Advice.....	83
Conclusion .....	85
Summary.....	85
References.....	87
Appendix A: Research Databases.....	104
Appendix B: Interview Guide.....	106
Appendix C: Participant Information.....	108

## List of Tables

Table 1. Summary of Study Participants .....	54
Table 2. Summary of Strategies for Success .....	74

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### Introduction

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled on the *Brown vs Board of Education* case. The ruling dismantled segregated public schools and expanded the access to schools for minorities (Garibaldi, 2014). The focus of the ruling was to allow African Americans the opportunity to the same quality of education afforded European American students. Although the ruling allowed African Americans the right to a quality education, more than half-century later, African American males are graduating from college at a much lower rate than other ethnic groups. African Americans make up 13.3% of the population in the United States (U.S Census Bureau, Population Division 2016) but earn only 10% of undergraduate degrees, 12% of graduate degrees, and 7% of doctoral degrees (U.S Department of Education, 2017). African American males lead European Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic American males in unemployment rate. The Bureau of Labor (2018) showed that African American males age 16 and higher have an unemployment rate of 6.7%, European American males 3.2%, Asian American males 3.0%, and Hispanic American males 4.1%.

In this study, I explored the background of the education of African American males and their perception of some of the issues that affect their academic progress. I will also outline problems associated with the education of African American males, such as low graduation rates, internal barriers, and external barriers. I addressed implications for social change and how this study will benefit the community. I explored some of the

perceived reasons for the disparity in college degree obtainment by African American males and the strategies used to overcome the barriers to education.

### **Background**

There are scholars who have explored both internal and external barriers to education that African American males face. Some of the researchers focused on internal barriers such as stereotype threats and ethnic identity. Steele and Aronson (1995) suggested that negative stereotypes affected the African American males' perception of their academic abilities during frustrating tasks. Ethnic identity can be an interior barrier that begins early in the child's development stages. Ethnic identity as it pertains to African Americans may be defined as the attitudes held by individuals of African descent and how these individuals view (a) themselves as African Americans, (b) other individuals of African descent, and (c) individuals from other racial and ethnic groups (Worrell, Mendoza-Denton, Telesford, Simmons, & Martin, 2011). African American males may face both internal and external barriers to higher education. The internal barriers may be overcome with examples of success and personal achievements. Because the external barriers are out of the control of the individual African American male, a more strategic approach is necessary. There is a gap in the discipline of education that addresses the strategies used to overcome these barriers.

Kelly, Maynigo, Wesley and Durham (2013) focused on the issue of structural racism as an external barrier to education for African American males. African American males are overrepresented in special education and underrepresented in advanced placement classes. European American teachers working in predominantly African

American schools may have developed low achievement expectations for African American males (Puchner, & Markowitz, 2015). Henfield and Washington (2012) studied how European American teachers feel about their ability to teach African American male students and found that educators who are culturally relevant will be able to exhibit confidence in African American students' ability to learn by maintaining high academic expectations and affirming their cultural identity (Henfield & Washington 2012).

To study the internal and external barriers to education I used field theory. Field theory was developed by Lewin starting in the 1920s. Field theory is used to explore the factors that sustain undesirable behaviors and those that strengthen the factors that promote desired behavior (Burnes & Cooke, 2013). One desired behavior is acculturation. Diemer (2007) suggested that African American males must acculturate into the European American opportunity structure while maintaining their African American culture. Dubois suggested that African American males benefit more from schools that focus on their situations in U.S. culture (as cited in Jones, 2014). Religious practices were also seen as a factor that may promote desired behavior. Butler-Barnes, Williams, and Chavous (2012) claimed that religion stimulates racial pride that will increase the academic performance of the African American male. Overcoming the barriers to education for African American males may reduce the gap in college degree attainment.



### **Problem Statement**

African American males face many obstacles and barriers to graduation from a mixed-race, 4-year resident college or university. Some of those barriers include a low self-concept and a negative ethnic identity (Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013), a lack of a positive self-image, and resilience (Steele, Spencer, & Lynch, 1993), and teachers who were not prepared to work with multicultural classrooms (Henfield & Washington, 2012). Lower graduation rates of African American males from a mixed-race, 4-year resident college or university may be attributed to many factors. Cokley and Chapman (2008) explored self-concept and ethnic identity as two factors that influence academic success among African American male students. African American males may develop a low self-concept by the internal and external factors that create barriers to education. For example, some African American males are disproportionately placed in special education classes that do not prepare them for college (Scott et al., 2013). This external factor may lead to development of a low self-concept of African American males' academic abilities.

Internal factors may be the ethnic and cultural identities of African American males. Ethnic identity is a key component of the self that is related to a sense of membership and the feelings and attitudes associated with that membership (Cokley & Chapman, 2008). If a pattern of unsuccessful academic achievement among African American males is perceived by the African American male as consistent, a negative ethnic or cultural identity may develop.

Kelly et al. (2013) discussed structural racism and stereotypes as barriers to positive outlooks of education. Stone, Harrison, and Mottley (2012) focused on stereotype threats and how they affect the cognitive balance of the student. Stereotype threats are categorized into three cues: the first cue is that the social group usually underperforms in a domain; the second is that the student positively identifies with that group; and the third is that the student has a desire to perform well in the domain (Stone et al., 2012). The domain addressed in my study was African American males 'college degree attainment from a mixed-race, 4-year resident college or university. Few scholars explore the strategies used to overcome those barriers. Further study into the barriers of obtaining a college degree by African American males from mixed-race, 4-year resident colleges or universities is necessary to understand the reasons for the low degree obtainment percentages of African American males. I explored the strategies used by African American males who graduated from a multiple race, 4-year resident college or university within the last 2 years that helped them overcome the barriers to earning a college degree.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the study was to explore the strategies used by African American males to overcome the barriers to earning a college degree from a mixed-race, 4-year college or university. I selected African American males because of the disparity in the graduation rates between the African American male and males of other ethnic groups. For example, the college graduation rate for African American male students who started school in 2009 and graduated in 2015 was 18%, compared to 39.2% college graduation

rate for Asian American male students, 37.8% for European American male students, and 25.7% for Hispanic American male students during that same time frame (U.S Department of Education, 2017). The gap in the graduation rate may indicate issues faced by African American males that may not be experienced by other ethnic groups. I explored those issues to understand the coping mechanisms and strategies used by African American males who experienced those issues.

### **Research Questions**

1. How did African American male college graduates overcome perceived barriers to education, so they can graduate from a multiple-race, 4-year resident college or university?
2. What are the perceived barriers to graduation faced by African American male graduates from a multiple-race, 4-year resident college or university?

### **Nature of the Study**

To explore the phenomenon of low college graduation rates of African American males, I used a qualitative multiple case study. A multiple case study consists of separate case studies cross-analyzed for the results (Yin, 2012). Each participant's education experience was documented from interviews and cross-analyzed for similarities using constant comparison analysis and Lewin's force field analysis. Constant comparison analysis allowed me to group the data into sections and label the sections with a descriptive code, as suggested by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007). Force field analysis is used to frame problems in terms of factors that cause resistance to change and those factors that support change in the desired direction (Lewin, 1942).

The selection of the sample size was critical to the exploration of the phenomenon. The sample size was large enough so that I did not fail to discover a perception. Qualitative sample sizes are smaller than that of quantitative research. Qualitative researchers are more focused on the in-depth understanding of a phenomenon along with the how and why of an issue, process, situation, subculture, scene, or set of social interactions (Dworkin, 2012). With this understanding of qualitative research sample sizes, I used six participants for this study. The participants were male college graduates of a mixed race, 4-year resident college or university who graduated within the past 2 years and self-identify as African American.

I used two data collection methods. The first method was interviews. I conducted semi structured interviews that allowed the discussion to develop and flow naturally. The second method was current literature. Current literature on the African American education provided a background of the phenomenon. By using these methods, I was able to collect the data of how African American males may overcome the perceived barriers.

### **Definition of Terms**

The understanding of the following terms is essential for the focus of this study.

*Academic success:* Academic success is defined as the resilience and successful adaptation in the face of social disadvantage (Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013).

*Achievement motivation:* Achievement motivation refers to a person's drive to perform difficult tasks to the best of his or her ability (Kretchmar, 2016).

*African American male:* For this study, the term African American male referred to those who self-identify as Black or African American male.

*Ethnic identity:* Ethnic identity is based on the culture of a person's ancestors' national or tribal group as modified by the demands of the culture in which a person's group currently resides (Smith & Trimble, 2016).

*Historically Black universities and colleges (HBCU):* An HBCU is a predominantly Black university or college developed through the Morrill Act of 1890.

*Institutional racism:* Institutional racism refers to overt and covert policies, practices, and laws that reinforce racial inequality, White superiority, and subordination of certain racial groups in relation to access to resources, opportunities, and power (Mendez, Hogan, & Culhane, 2014).

*Mentoring:* For this study, mentoring referred to the practice of nurturing the student's social and psychological development while serving as a role model and providing support for goal setting and future planning (Smith, 2017).

*Meritocratic society:* The term meritocratic society refers to the belief that all a person must do is work hard to obtain success (Dixson, Clayton, Peoples, & Reynolds, 2016).

*Microaggression:* This term refers to the subtle insults directed toward people of color (Preston-Cunningham, Boyd, Elbert, Dooley, & Peck-Parrott, 2016).

*Multiple race college or university:* For this study multiple race college or university referred to an institution of higher learning that does not target one specific ethnic group such as an HBCU.

*Poverty rate:* The poverty rate measures the percentage of people whose income falls below their assigned poverty threshold. Poverty thresholds are assigned to individuals or families based on family size and composition (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

*Resilience:* Resilience refers to the act of being able to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013).

*Self-actualization:* Self-actualization refers to the fulfillment of becoming more and more of what a person can become (Krems, Kenrick, & Neel, 2017).

*Self-concept:* Self-concept refers to a person's self-perceptions formed through experience with interpretations of his or her environment (Marsh, 2016).

*Self-image:* For this study self-image referred to how African American males view themselves in relation to other African American males and other ethnic group males.

*Stereotypes:* Stereotypes refer to an association between groups and the characteristics attributed with those groups (Kurylo, 2012).

*Stereotype threats:* Stereotype threat refers to being at risk of confirming as self-characteristic a negative stereotype about one's group (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

### **Significance**

This study may provide the information necessary to understand the worldviews of African American males regarding barriers in higher education. The findings may also show stakeholders where changes and adjustments to education tactics and curriculum may be beneficial to alleviate or remove the perceived barriers. These changes may alter

the perception of the achievement potential of the African American male. By providing a clear understanding of the barriers, the stakeholders may incorporate coping mechanisms and intervention strategies related to education. The tactics uncovered in the study may help African American males in their academic careers.

Expanding college obtainment benefits society in terms of greater productivity, higher tax revenues, lowered reliance on social support programs, and a more informed and involved citizenry (Baum, Kurose, Ma, & College, 2013). The findings from this study may help uncover the strategies and tools necessary to close the education gap between ethnic groups. By closing the education gap, there is the potential to also close the earnings and leadership gap.

The findings from this study may uncover issues related to student retention. A common barrier that affects many students is the cost of a postsecondary education. The cost of a college education has increased to the point that many students find it difficult to continue their education. Financial counseling is a strategy used to manage the cost of a postsecondary education. However, students who sought financial counseling were more likely to discontinue college within the next year (Britt, Ammerman, Barrett, & Jones, 2017).

The key factor in obtaining a college degree is the individual student. The students' persistence and engagement will be the determining factor in their success. This study may reveal some of the best practices African American males used to help them earn their college degrees. The strategies used to overcome the barriers to education for

African American males may also be used by other ethnic groups who experience similar barriers.

### **Framework**

The framework of the study was Lewin's (1942) field theory and force field analysis. Field theory is one category in the overall concept in Lewin's planned change. Field theory was chosen because it allows for the understanding of the forces that sustain undesired behaviors, and to identify those forces that would need to be either strengthened or weakened to bring about desired behaviors (Burnes & Cooke, 2013). Field theory allowed me to explore both the internal and external barriers of higher education as well as strategies to overcoming those barriers. Further research on these barriers and strategies are covered in Chapter 2. Field theory allowed me to consider the positive elements of the life space of African American males. The life space is the total psychological environment that some experience subjectively but not necessarily consciously (Burns & Cook, 2013). A more in-depth review of field theory is outlined in Chapter 2.

There are internal and external barriers to education that hinder African American males from entering and completing college. A force field analysis of the problem of low African American male college completion compared to other ethnic groups helped uncover those barriers to education and helped answer the research questions. I used the force field analysis to explore those forces that were either driving movement toward a goal or blocking movement toward a goal. I also helped explore those strategies that helped change the negative behavior that contributes to a low college graduation rate and



helped strengthen the positive behavior.

### **Assumptions**

It was assumed that the participants faced education barriers that affected African American males that are addressed in recent literature. The participants faced at least one barrier to their education that was vital to the nature of the study. The participants overcame their barriers as evidenced by them graduating from college.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

African American males are graduating from college at a lower rate than males of other ethnic groups. This study was designed to explore the issues that influenced the disparity in graduation rates and the methods used to overcome the identified barriers. I used participants who self-identified as African American male and have recently graduated in the past 2 years from a 4-year resident multiple-race college or university. The participants were interviewed to gain knowledge of any barriers they may have experienced in pursuit of their college education and the strategies used to overcome those barriers. This study represented a small sample of African American males' perceptions of the barriers to higher education. I only focused on the male college graduate perspective of persons living in the geographic area of Savannah, Georgia.

### **Limitations**

The population was limited to African American male graduates in Southern Georgia. Limitations also involved the availability of African American male college graduates. The first 10 participants who responded to the recruitment survey and met the criteria for participation were used. Biases may also create limitations. Biases were

addressed by following the institutional review board (IRB) guidelines for research, following my interview guide, employing the services of a peer-debriefer, using reflective journal writing, and recording the data accurately. The final limitation was this was only a sample and it did not represent all the African American male population.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings from this study may allow educators to understand the internal cognitive issues and the external economic and social issues that develop into barriers to education for African American males. Colleges and universities may develop the resources that are essential to African American males to help close the college attainment gap between them and other ethnic groups. Wood and Palmer (2015) explained the many benefits to obtaining a college degree for the community. Wood and Palmer stated that African American males face alienation from an unsupportive faculty and a curriculum that is exclusive of their heritage. Faculty at mixed-race universities and colleges may have low expectations of African American male students (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Colleges and universities may develop the resources that are essential to African American males. More college graduates coming from the African American community will increase the opportunities for them to invest in the community. Hughes (2010) explained that as an African American faculty member, students of color were often out of touch with him because they are not used to seeing African American males in a teacher's position. Seeing more African American males in professional positions creates achievement motivation for young African American males.

## Summary

The intent of this study was to identify the barriers to education and ways to overcome the barriers that African American males faced when earning a college degree. African American males earn fewer college degrees than European Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans (The National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). The data collected from the interviews, printed statistics, current literature, and demographic information provided the data necessary to assess the phenomenon. The findings from the study may provide researchers, educators, and stakeholders with information necessary to make changes in the education practices of African American males.

Current and past literature relevant to the education history, barriers, and theories related to the African American males' higher education issues help in the construction of Chapter 1. The same strategy was applied to constructing the literature review in Chapter 2. The literature review focused on the theoretical framework, prevalence of barriers, risk factors, conditions affecting graduation rates, education interventions, mentoring interventions, qualitative approach, family dynamics, perception of self-efficiency, and community factors. The literature addressing these topics helped me understand more about the phenomenon

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

In this chapter current and past literature was reviewed to gain current knowledge of the African American males experience in pursuit of a college degree. This literature review also addressed the theories used by previous researchers that helped form the theoretical framework for this study. The internal cognitive issues and external economic and social issues that may result in barriers to education are addressed along with intervention strategies. The internal barriers consist of cognitive issues, such as stereotype threats, self-image, racism-related stress, ethnic identity, and achievement motivation. External barriers consist of institutional racism, systematic racism, underrepresentation in advanced placement classes, inequality of income, and economic segregation. Intervention strategies have been implemented to increase the graduation rates of African American males; yet, the graduation rates of African American males remain statistically behind European American males, Asian American males, and African American females. Because of these barriers, many African American males enter college unprepared for the culture and curriculum of college and fail to earn their degree (Grier-Reed, Ehlert, & Dade, 2011).

In Chapter 2, I discuss the perceived barriers to completing a college degree, the risks factors of African American males not completing a college degree, and the conditions that affect the African American males' graduation rates. I discuss the methods used to overcome the barriers, such as education interventions and mentoring interventions. I discuss the research approach and explain the method used to analyze the

problem and collect the data. Last, I discuss the cultural factors of obtaining a college degree. I cover the family dynamics, the perception of self-efficacy, and community factors.

African American male students are graduating from college at a much lower rate than European American males (Garibaldi, 2014). The number of people in the United States with a bachelor's degree rose from 12% in 1994 to 22 % in 2015 (U.S Census Bureau, 2016). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2017) addressed the graduation rates between males of different ethnic groups. The National Center for Educational Statistics showed that African American males have the lowest college graduation rate compared to Asian American males, European American males, and Hispanic American males. For the 6-year cohort beginning in 2010, Asian Americans had a 53.6% graduation rate, European Americans had a 48.5% graduation rate, Hispanic Americans had a 37.7% graduation rate, and African Americans had a 24.9% graduation rate. There are disparities in the graduation rates among race and ethnicity.

Statistics on African American male graduation rates are available in several education studies. Patton (2012) reported that although 40% of African American males enrolled in college, only 16% went on to complete degrees, compared with 20% of African American women and 32% of European American men. Kelly et al. (2013) suggested that part of the disparity in the graduation rates may be attributed to institutional racism. In 1967, Carmichael coined the term institutional racism (author, year). Institutional racism is defined as the collective failure of institutions to provide appropriate and professional services to people because of their color, culture, or

ethnicity (González, 2007). Institutional racism may be evident in ability grouping and tracking. Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown (2015) suggested that ability grouping, and tracking contributed to African Americans overrepresentation in vocational studies and underrepresentation in advanced placement courses.

In this qualitative, multiple case study, I focused on the barriers to education that African American males face and the strategies that some used to overcome those barriers and earn a college degree. I searched 10 databases to address the barriers that African Americans face and how these barriers affect the self-actualization and self-evaluation of African American males. The 10 data bases searched were: *Academic Search Complete, American Doctoral Dissertations, Education Resource Information Center, Education Source, Political Science Complete, Primary Search, Psyc Articles, Psyc Books, Psyc Critiques, Research Starters Education, and SocIndex with Full Text* (Appendix A). I also explain my theoretical framework, barriers to education, and the risk factors involved if African American males are unsuccessful in attaining a college education. I address the conditions affecting graduation, the intervention strategies, the self-efficiency of African American males, community factors, and the qualitative approach to the study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I used field theory to explore the factors that sustain undesirable behaviors and those that strengthen the factors that promote desired behavior. I used the theory of stereotype threat to analyze the achievement motivation of the participants. I used the achievement motivation theory to analyze the strategies that the participants used to

overcome their barriers to earning their degree. These three theories combined to form the theoretical frameworks for this study. Burnes and Cook (2013) stated that using field theory allows for the construction of a life space. Constructing a life space helped me to understand the behavior of individuals and groups. Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014) referred to life space as social space. African American males who think that they will not succeed in higher education may think that because of believed stereotypes. This is an example of stereotype threats.

Steele and Aronson (1995) defined stereotype threat as “being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group” (p.797) Individuals who identify with a certain group and that group is perceived as not able to achieve a certain task may make the individual less likely to achieve that task. Wood and Palmer (2015) claimed that some teachers and instructors have low expectations of African American male students. Some teachers and instructors may perceive African American males as less academically competent than their European American counterparts. Stone et al. (2012) studied the impact of stereotype threat and the African American male athlete as college athletes being considered “dumb jocks.” According to the stereotype threat, African American males who participate in college athletics will be more challenged in the classroom than students who are not college athletes (author, year). African American males may have multiple stereotype threats depending on the circumstances of the student. Croizet, Désert, Dutrévis, and Leyens (2001) studied the effects of stereotype threats on three groups: African Americans, low socioeconomic status students, and women. African American and low socioeconomic students reported

as falling below that of European American students whose parents graduated from college (Croizet et al., 2001). Therefore, it was important to incorporate achievement motivation into this study.

McClelland et al. (1953) explained achievement motivation by first explaining that motives are developed out of repeated effective experiences connected with certain types of situations. Achievement motivation is operationalized by mastery goal orientation, which reflects a learning orientation that emphasizes persistent effort, continual self-improvement, mastery of learning content, and adaptive responses to failure (McClelland et al. 1953). Positive achievement motivation may be hindered by cognitive beliefs such as critical race theory. Dixson (2018) stated that critical race theory scholars presumed that education policies have contributed to racial advantage and disadvantage pertaining to education

### **Prevalence of Barriers**

There are internal and external barriers to achieving a college degree experienced by African American male students. Internal barriers include stereotype threats, ethnic identity, and achievement motivation. External barriers consist of critical race theory, institutional racism, and structural racism. To understand the perception of education among African American males, scholars must first understand the history of education of African Americans. Levine and Levine (2014) tracked the history of African American education from slavery to present day and found that several issues shaped the beginning of educating African Americans. During slavery, African Americans were not allowed a formal education. After slavery, the process of educating African Americans began with



separate schools for African Americans (Levine and Levine 2014). Levine and Levine (2014) also cited the 1895 *Plessy v Ferguson* decision that upheld the separate but equal decision until the 1954 Supreme Court ruling that schools cannot deny access to a student based on race. HBCUs were created through the Morrill Act of 1890. The Morrill Act of 1890 required colleges to integrate or funds were to be set aside for African American institutions of higher education.

Scholars who have addressed the strategies to improve college graduation focused on the resources that are in place through the individual institutions of higher learning and not the individual's own resources for overcoming educational obstacles. Scott et al. (2013) discussed the lack of academic study on African American males who overcame their environmental obstacles and became successful in graduating from college. This gap in research warrants a study into the resilience of African American males and how they overcame the barriers to achieving a college degree.

Dixson et al. (2016) identified how racism pertains to the educational experiences of the African American student. Issues such as structural racism in which policies contributing to funding disparity of the schools and zoning laws that kept some schools segregated contributed to the inequality of education (author, year). Dixson et al. showed how racism affects and is engrained in the fabric of the United States. The U.S. culture is based on a meritocratic society. This means that all a person must do is work hard to obtain success (Dixson et al., 2016). This would exclude other factors such as economic stability, racial tensions, negative ethnic identities, and a lack of achievement motivation caused by stereotype threats.

Stone et al. (2012) also studied stereotype threats and categorized stereotype threats into three cues: the first is that the social group usually underperforms in a domain; the second is that the student positively identifies with that group; and the third is that the student has a desire to perform well in the domain. Naylor et al. (2015) studied the underrepresentation of African Americans in higher education and found that a part of the problem is the poverty rate of African Americans. African Americans make up 13.3% of the U.S. population but 22.9% of African Americans ages 18-64 live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The inequality of income, economic segregation, and institutional racism are factors that contribute to the barriers faced by African American males in pursuit of a college degree.

### **Risk Factors**

African American students may face risk factors during their academic career. For the purposes for this study, risk factors are defined as the potential difficulties while attending college and the consequences of not earning the degree. Tovar-Murray, Jenifer, Andrusyk, D'Angelo, and Tia (2012) identified racism-related stress and ethnic identity as risk factors to African American college student and suggested that the more African American college students identified with their ethnic heritage, the weaker the effects of racism-related stress became. Along with race-related stress, African American college students face microaggression as a risk factor to obtaining a college degree. Preston-Cunningham et al. (2016) defined microaggression as subtle insults directed toward people of color. The experience of microaggressions may affect the self-esteem of

African American males. Plunkett, White, Carter, and Finch Horner (2016) explained how the relationships of parents with African American males attribute to the level of their self-esteem. A low self-esteem may be attributed to environments that possess risk factors such as racism and poverty that may lower self-esteem.

Davis, Coward, and Jackson (2013) studied the risk factors of African American males who do not earn a college degree and found that both personal and societal factors contribute to the African American male not earning a college degree and subjecting themselves to the potential risks of being undereducated. Personal factors affecting African American consist of African American males who are not prepared academically to enter college. These individuals may have to take jobs that classify them as underemployed or enter the penal system and be perceived as a burden on the economy (author, year). Societal factors include an increase in incarcerations, which decrease in contributions to society and hinder the African American community from competing in the global market (Davis et al., 2013).

Taylor and Brown (2013) focused on the risk factors for African American males that begin in the public-school system that hinder their success in colleges and universities and some of the strategies that may be implemented to overcome those risk factors. Some of those risk factors include low teacher expectations, poverty factors, literacy skills, cultural differences, and a label of being at-risk (Taylor & Brown, 2013). The strategies that may be implemented to reduce those risk factors are test practice, listening and recall, note taking, and responding to text and task (Taylor & Brown, 2013).

### **Conditions Affecting Graduation Rates**

Scholars have focused on multiple reasons for the difference in enrollment and graduation rates. One reason why African American males' are less likely to enroll in college or graduate from college is African American males' self-image. Butler-Barnes et al. (2012) theorized that the low graduation rate of African American males may be attributed to a lack of racial pride but may be strengthened through religious practices. Kretchmar (2016) suggested that achievement motivation among African American males may be diminished by a lack of a positive outlook of the benefits of a quality education. Achievement motivation is key in the ethnic identity. Kretchmar explained how achievement motivation or expectancy value theory focuses on two factors: how the individual values the outcome of a task and how that individual perceives his or her ability to succeed in performing that task.

There are several issues linked to African American males' negative perception of education. Steele, Spencer, and Lynch (1993) focused on the resilience of the African American males' ability to overcome the threats to his self-image. The self-affirming, image-maintaining process starts with anything that threatens the self-image by the negative judgments of others (Steele et al., 1993). Kelly et al. (2013) discussed structural racism and stereotypes as barriers to a positive outlook of education. Other conditions that affect graduation rate stem from the college preparation of the African American student. Although the student is in high school, he is subject to more suspensions and being labeled as having a learning disability, placing African American males in special education classes. Wood and Palmer (2015) found five issues that hinder African

American male progress: African American males locked out of early childhood education, student-centered learning, well-resourced community schools, gifted/ talented and advanced placement opportunities, and postsecondary attainment opportunities. Dixson et al. (2016) proposed that structural racism and not race neutral policies or individual decisions are the reasons for racial disparities in education.

Harper (2015) studied how African American males approach the racial stereotypes at multiple-race colleges and universities. Harper found that some of the stereotypes attached to African American males are a lack academic skill, a need for remedial instruction, and more interest in extracurricular activities than education. African American males may suffer from racial battle fatigue (Harper, 2015). Racial battle fatigue occurs when the individual must dispel stereotypes on a regular basis. Harper found that negative stereotypes about African Americans are reinforced in the media. This makes it more challenging to overcome these perceptions. Students respond to these stereotypes in diverse ways: anxiety and lower self-expectations. Perceptions about the university may change these issues and influence the academic success of the African American male.

### **Education Interventions**

There are several intervention strategies designed to help close the gap in college attainment for African American males. The first step in closing the college degree gap is helping African American males to complete high school requirements. In 2006 President George W. Bush and the Secretary of Education Margarete Spellings initiated legislation of single sex education as a public-school option. Dwarte (2014) found that single sex

schools increased students' achievements in reading, but further research is needed to assess the success of single sex schools across grade levels, school systems, and subject areas. Travis and Ausbrooks (2012) claimed that both mentoring and modeling that will promote growth and change in the attitude of African American males should be incorporated into schools.

Before the *Brown vs Board of Education* case of 1954 helped desegregate schools, Du Bois that African American boys would perform better in schools in which the instructors believed in and worked for their success (as cited in Jones, 2014). Jones (2014) considered Du Bois' argument of African American males having separate schools. Jones explained that African American males integrated into once predominantly European American schools may encounter instructors who do not believe in their achievement potential. Puncher and Markowitz (2015) explored the unconscious racist beliefs of teachers in the school system and found that European American teachers had lower expectations of African American students. These negative beliefs are a result of their perceptions of rational conclusions based on their logic and individual experiences (Puncher & Markowitz, 2015). Henfield and Washington (2012) also studied European American teachers' ability to teach ethnic students and found that teachers must be cognizant of their own racial and ethnic background and how these perceptions shape their beliefs about education and employ the strategies that will support the education of minority students.

Mitchell and Stewart (2013) also suggested that African Americans males would benefit from all male schools. According to critical race theory, racism is more than just

unconnected isolated acts by individuals, but is endemic to U.S. society, embedded in the legal, cultural, and psychological spheres (Mitchell & Stewart, 2013). Sleeter (2017) studied critical race theory as it pertains to teacher education and found that in 2012 the teaching force was about 82% European American. Of prospective teachers enrolled in traditional programs, 74% were European American, of those enrolled in university-based alternative programs, 65% were European American, and in non-university-based alternative programs, 59% were European American (Sleeter, 2017). African American students are potentially being taught by teachers who do not share their ethnic background. I stopped reviewing here due to time constraints. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at Chapter 3.

Butler-Barnes et al. (2012) conducted their study on the African American male's educational utility beliefs. The researchers focused on the positive achievement motivations of African American males. The study indicates that students with more positive educational utility beliefs are more likely to invest their time and efforts in school and to persist on academic tasks in the face of challenge (Butler-Barnes et al., 2012). The study considered racial pride and religiosity as positive achievement motivations that may affect academic performance. Barrett (2010) conducted a study focusing on the workings of W.E.B DuBois in which the Black church was a place of social support which is necessary for the student's acclimation into college.

Intervention strategies are developed in numerous ways and methods. Palmer, Strayhorn, Dancy, and Wood (2014) attributed TRIO programs, affirmative action, and

college readiness programs as intervention strategies that are critical to the success of African American males in post-secondary education. Recognizing a problem in the education statistics of African American males is only half of the solutions. Intervention strategies are necessary to help close the gap in the graduation and college entrance of African American males.

### **Mentoring Interventions**

Brittian, Sy, and Stokes (2009) focused on mentoring implications for African American college students. The inability to assimilate for African American college students may lead to a feeling of displacement, isolation, and the need to create a new identity. Brittian et al. (2009) suggested that the need for strong social support may mediate the stressors of assimilation and help the student adjust to college life. Mentoring is a method used to provide social support to students. Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, and Boyd (2009) identified 6 functions in the mentoring process that will assist in a successful mentor mentee relationship: (a) emphasis on the relationship, (b) emphasis on information exchange, (c) focus on facilitation, (d) focus on confrontation, (e) attention to their role as a model for the mentee, and (f) attention to the vision that the mentee brings to the relationship.

There are several types of mentoring techniques. McCoy, Winkle-Wagner, and Luedke (2015) explored the concept of color-blind mentoring. Color blind mentoring focused on White faculty perspectives on mentoring students of color. McCoy, Winkle-Wagner, and Luedke's study focused on the mentoring of graduate students of color. One of the strategies to a productive mentoring experience is for the mentor and the mentee to



have an open and honest dialog about race and racism. DeFreitas, and Bravo Jr. (2012) researched the influence of mentoring on the self-efficacy and academic achievement of African American and Latino students. The researchers found that involvement with faculty outside of the classroom enhances the self-efficacy of African American and Latino students.

### **Qualitative Approach**

The qualitative approach for this study is based on Kurt Lewin's field theory. Burnes and Cooke (2012) stated that it is possible to understand and predict the basis for changing behavior by constructing a life space. Field theory allows the researcher to understand the issues that sustain and change behavior. The research method used for this qualitative study was the case study. Each participant gave his account of the barriers he faced and how he overcame them.

Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) explained the rationale behind conducting a qualitative study in education. The authors outlined 6 features that supported the use of a qualitative study in education. First, a qualitative study provides natural occurring information. Second, qualitative data is collected close to the issue by either observation or interviews. Third, qualitative data possess the potential for revealing complexity. Fourth, the length of time the data is collected may allow for an analysis of historical, institutional, psychological, and social processes. Fifth, qualitative data focus on the lived experiences. Sixth, cultural meanings may be used to find answers to different issues. In relation to this study the fifth feature is the most relevant. Qualitative data centers on the lived experiences that school psychology researchers may use to study and understand the

phenomenon for the use of social change (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Lewis (2016) studied research in both qualitative and quantitative methods associated with the study of African American males. Interviewing is the primary method of data collection that supports qualitative research (Lewis, 2016). For this study interviewing was the primary data collection method.

### **Family Dynamics**

Short (2016) explained how schooling beliefs and behaviors, literacy beliefs and behaviors, and parental self-efficacy help shape the student's achievement motivation and their self-efficacy. Literacy beliefs between the African American low-income family and the school literacy practices may differ and influence the way that teachers approach the student and how they implement these practices into their classrooms.

Family plays a significant role in the development of the children and their perceptions of education. Hucks (2014) explained the vision of collective achievement of African American males. In his study Hucks focused on the school systems that have a low expectation of African American males, and society that views the African American family as broken, weak and unstable. Because there is little research on the achievement of African American's schooling, researchers have not viewed them as being knowledgeable of their own experiences (Hucks, 2014). African Americans are so far behind other ethnic groups in academic achievement that we must look at all possible reasons for the disparity. Puchner and Markowitz (2015) explored the perception of the value that African American families place on education.

Jarrett and Burton (1999) conducted a qualitative study into the family dynamics of African Americans. The authors used an ethnographic research approach to explore the African American family make up and support system. The authors focused on four dimensions of the family structure for African Americans: Extended family networks, socioeconomic structure of extended family networks, pace of change in family structure, and age structure of family members.

Kelly et al. (2013) introduced proximal process as a factor that impacts African American families. Proximal process conveys attachment and commitment across persons, families, and society (Kelly et al., 2013). The authors cited this as a problem with the development of some urban communities because of a lack of common focus and commitment to people in certain systems. This lack of common focus may be due to structural racism. Structural racism is defined by Kelly et al. (2013) as the ideologies, policies and practices that allow privileges associated with Whiteness and the disadvantages associated with people of color.

Baker (2014) studied the positive effects of the African American father involvement in the academic success of the children. The study of the African American father does fall short to correlate this to cognitive development, but it does support the theory that involvement of the father will help in the development in reading and mathematics. This may be a systematic barrier that is created by a high number of absentee and part time African American fathers. Baker's study focused on the socioeconomic standing of the African American father and how that attributes to the academic success of his children.

Curtis, Grinnell-Davis, & Alleyne-Green, (2017) also studied the effects of the African American father or father figures on African American adolescence. The study theorized that African American adolescents who live with their father or father figure and have a positive relationship, open communication, and an emotional connection would experience a more positive education outcome. The positive education outcome consisted of higher grades, fewer school suspensions, and a higher interest in attending college.

### **Perception of Self-Efficacy**

The self-efficacy of the African American male is tested in the navigation of what is perceived as two worlds. Diemer (2007) described two worlds as a person of color successfully negotiating and navigating their own culture of origin and the predominantly White opportunity structure (Diemer, 2007).

Harrison, Martin and Fuller (2015) focused on self-determination theory as a motivational drive. The theory is comprised of three psychological needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness (Harrison, Martin & Fuller, 2015). The authors used phenomenological interviews to gather their data on the academic experiences of African American college athletes. This study focused on the academic experiences of high performing African American student athletes. Nichols, Kotchick, Barry, and Haskins (2010) suggested that African American males' interest in education may decline based on the larger systemic barriers to education.

Many African Americans face barriers to a college degree that may be attributed to critical race theory. Dixson (2007) stated that critical race theory presumes that racism

has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage. Critical race theory may be evident in the beginning stages of the African American male's scholastic experience. Allen and White-Smith (2014) researched the "School to Prison Pipeline" theory. The authors found that critical race theory could be used to help explain why African American males are over- represented in the prisons and underrepresented in the colleges and universities. Allen and White-Smith (2014) said that racial incongruence and the over-reliance on dominant discourses regarding Black males resulted in teachers regularly perceiving their Black male students as deviant and interpret Black male behaviors as overly aggressive, disrespectful, defiant, and intimidating.

The findings showed that due to these perceptions of African American males, the teachers subject the African American male student to more observation and disciplinary action than White students. This leads to more suspensions and expulsions. The misunderstanding and harsh treatment of the African American male student may alter their impression of education and affect their self-actualization toward education. Wood, Newman, and Harris (2015) conducted a study on the importance and effects of an elevated level of self-efficacy. What the authors found was that elevated levels of self-actualization produced these seven attributes: a) reduced stress and anxiety, b) a social and cultural adjustment to college life, c) increased satisfaction with college, d) more defined life purpose, e) improved reading, writing and enunciation skills, f) a pursuit of personal and academic development.

Hargrove and Kim (2013) conducted a study of education resiliency among African American males. Because of the barriers to education faced by African American males, resiliency is a key component in academic success. The authors defined education resiliency as the ability of students to succeed academically, despite the challenging life circumstances and risk factors that prevent them from succeeding (Hargrove & Kim, 2013). The study found that African American male students who attend predominantly White institutions experienced macroaggressions that create barriers to their education. African American male students who attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities experience a culture that cultivates their success. Part of the self-efficacy of African American male students consisted of using peers, family, mentors, and spirituality to support education resiliency.

Bentley-Edwards, Agonafer, Edmondson, and Flannigan (2016) studied the effects of racial factors on goal efficiency. The study found that students of color based their goal attainment on effort and challenging work. Their White counterparts are more likely to base their goal attainment on their own ability. The African American male's perception of racial identity will play a distinct role in the way he sets his goals and how he plans to achieve them. The demographics, racial identity, racial cohesion and dissonance and racial stress all contribute to the goals set and achieved by African American male students.

Hughes, Kiecolt, Keith, and Demo, (2015) studied the influence of identity on African Americans. The authors suggested the social identity explains a person's self-concepts as they identify with a certain group and how they influence intergroup behavior

and the processes of that group. Social identity is the perception that African American males have of their group. It is because of these beliefs that they react to social issues in a certain manner.

Gullan, Hoffman, and Leff (2011) studied development of identity among African Americans. The authors focused on the 1986 study by Erik Erikson that states the adolescence is a key period to develop identity. Being successful in navigating this initial period of identity development will result in an identity achievement but failing to be successful will result in role confusion (Gullan, Hoffman, & Leff, 2011). Failing to develop an adaptive sense of self can lead young African Americans to maladaptive coping measures such as dropping out of school because of low identity achievement from stereotype threats.

### **Community Factors**

The community factors begin with the home. McCallum (2016) suggested that African American students whose parents have attended college are more likely to attend themselves. Kelly (1999) outlined several points of interest with community factors. Community leadership was a major point of Kelly (1999). Some of the issue that community leaders face is coping with the loss of jobs, understaffed agencies that are trying to find funds for development projects, and the length of time it takes to initiate and develop working relationships between university faculty and staff, community organizations and community residents Allen and White-Smith (2014) studied the effects of the critical race theory as a community barrier to the education of African American men. Critical race theory focuses on the idea that racism is ingrained into the fabric of

American life resulting in institutional racism. The authors outlined the institutional racism factor of the state of the public schools attended by African Americans and how critical race theory uncovered that African American males are disproportionately likely to attend underfunded public schools and have limited access to school knowledge, making them more likely to be placed into lower ability academic tracks. These factors contribute to the African American male being more susceptible to poverty and encounters with the law.

Savage (2013) studied the impact of after school programs on African American males. Many of the issues and barriers to higher education for African American males start while they are in grade school. The development of the perception of education must be directed in a positive manor. Barrett (2010) studied the relationship of the urban Black church and the educational outcomes of African American students. The study found that African American students who attend church on a regular basis outperformed those who attended church less frequently in math, reading, science, and social studies (Barrett, 2010). Through this study, Barrett (2010) found that religious socialization reinforces the attitudes, outlooks, behaviors and practices.

### **Summary**

A review of the literature pertaining to the African American males' education path revealed the internal barriers of stereotype threat, ethnic identity and achievement motivation and external barriers of critical race theory, institutional racism and systematic racism. These barriers require a research study to fully understand how they affect African American male in pursuit of higher education. The literature review addressed



social issues such as stereotypes about African American males and how they are perceived by educators. There were educators who regularly perceived their African American male students as deviant and interpret. Other stereotypes about African American male students were that their behaviors were overly aggressive, disrespectful, defiant, and intimidating.

Field theory helps to explain how and why the perceptions of the African American male has continued through each generation. Family dynamics and community factors help establish the life space of African American males and will help guide their education pursuits. Further study is necessary to understand the perception to the barriers to higher education for African American males. The next chapter will outline the methods that will be used to collect and analyze the data based on the knowledge gained from the literature review.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I address the methodology used to conduct the study to help answer these research questions:

1. How did African American male college graduates overcome the perceived barriers so they can graduate from a multiple-race, 4-year resident college or university?
2. What are the perceived barriers to graduation faced by African American males enrolled in a multiple-race, 4-year resident college or university?

For this study, I used a qualitative research design with an intensive explanatory multiple case study approach. A qualitative study was selected instead of a quantitative study. Qualitative researchers focus on the what and why distinction questions of the phenomenon (Barnham, 2015). A quantitative study would give me the data that shows the disparity in graduation rates, but it may be limited on giving the reasons for the disparity. I used the qualitative research approach to obtain insight into the African American males' identification, perception, and strategies used in overcoming the barriers to obtaining a college degree. A qualitative research design allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of how African American males navigate their college career in a multiple-race, 4-year resident college or university.

The case study approach allowed me to use real-life experiences to gain an understanding of the perceptions of the barriers to education and the strategies used to overcome those barriers. I selected the explanatory method because research questions

have been established and it will help give a description to the phenomenon. An intensive method was selected because of the focus on perceptions based on experiences.

In this chapter, I cover the rationale for using the case study approach, the case study research design, the role of the researcher, data collection, ethical considerations, data analysis, and the summary. Each section is a justification of the methodology and research design. I also explain why certain methods of research were selected over other methods and how ethical standards were maintained to protect the participants and the integrity of the research.

### **Rationale for Case Study Research**

African American male students desiring to enter postsecondary education face uncertain outcomes, and the majority will not earn a college degree (Wood, 2014). There are many barriers that African American males experience during their academic careers. Not all barriers are experienced by all African American males. Not all African American males who experienced the same barriers cope with and overcome them in the same manner. This may create multiple theories of study for the research. This research was designed to look at the barriers to education, and through the individual experiences of African American males, explore the barriers introduced in the literature review. I identified the barriers not introduced in the literature review and answered the how and why questions associated with the identified barriers. Examples of how and why questions are the following: how are the barriers perceived by African American males, how may these barriers be overcome, and why do African American males experience these barriers? To explore the phenomenon, I chose the case study research approach.

The case study approach can be used to investigate the case (s) in relation to its historical, economic, technological, social, and cultural context (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). These issues were consistent with the issues addressed in the literature review. The primary advantage of using a case study approach is it allows researchers to formulate a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004). In this study, the participants came from different economic and social backgrounds. They participated in various aspects of college life that produced additional barriers. These barriers were analyzed to explore their relationship with the internal and external barriers to education and provided an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

### **Case Study Research Approach**

A qualitative case study was selected for this study because (a) limited research focused on the perceptions of barriers to education faced by African American males and (b) a case study into this phenomenon provided an in-depth understanding of a small number of cases set in a real-world context. Because I explored multiple experiences of the barriers that African American males face, this was a multiple case study. As the researcher, I was able to bring a construction of reality to the phenomenon. A construction of reality to the phenomenon means interacting with other people's interpretations of the same phenomenon (Yazan, 2015). It is not to be confused with an extensive case study because the focus is not on replicating cases although lateral or theoretical replications may occur. This was an intensive case study using a holistic description. In an intensive case study, the researcher focuses on the perceptions,

conceptions, and experiences of the participants in relation to the phenomenon (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). In the holistic description, I focused on the phenomenon and the individual parts that created the barriers to education.

Researchers choose their method based on the research questions (Doucerain, Vargas, & Ryder, 2016). The research questions are designed to explore the phenomenon from multiple perspectives. I asked open-ended questions that required the participants to elaborate on their personal college experiences, the barriers that they have experienced, and how they either overcame or coped with those barriers to earn their college degree. A multiple case study approach allowed for an exploration into several different college experiences of African American male students. The participants of the study were college athletes, work study students, and military veterans. There was a variance in family dynamics that caused different outlooks and perceptions of the educational barriers. These circumstances, along with those uncovered during the data collection, are why an intensive multiple case study was the best approach.

I chose a case study approach because I wished to conduct an in-depth inquiry of the phenomenon. An intensive, explanatory, multiple case study design allowed multiple individual cases to provide different views, new factors, and different approaches to overcoming the barriers to education. During the in-depth inquiry, I reached a state of saturation. Reaching saturation was time consuming because there is no set number of participants. Each participant uncovered a new barrier. This developed new theories that call for further research. The point of saturation is determined when the participants stop giving additional information (Constantinou, Georgiou, & Perdikiogianni, 2017). The

participants began to repeat barriers and perceptions of the phenomenon.

### **Role of the Researcher**

One of the roles of the qualitative researcher is as a tool. The role of the researcher as a tool extends to the analysis of the data (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). The researcher may use his or her own experiences with the phenomenon as a part of the study. My role as the researcher was to transform the data into themes. These themes were analyzed for consistencies, and patterns were established. As an African American male who has graduated from a multiple-race, 4-year college or university, I have experienced some barriers to education. My experiences allowed me to identify with the participants and develop an understanding of their views on the barriers. My experiences were not directly analyzed but were used as a tool to understand the experiences of the participants. I did not allow my experiences to deter me from analyzing the data from a researcher's point of view. Analyzing the data from a researcher's point of view required the use of the perspective of etic and emic. Etic refers to culture-free characteristics of the barriers to education. Emic would refer to culture-specific barriers to education (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). During the data collection phase, I made reflective journal entries after every interview. Using the reflective journal allowed me to capture each participant's experience. I was able to note how the participant felt about a certain barrier, what strategies he used to overcome that barrier, and what he learned from using that strategy.

During the writing phase, I used a peer debriefer to identify biases in the journal entries. My peer debriefer is an adjunct professor who holds a Doctor of Business Administration degree. I had frequent contact with the peer debriefer in the form of e-

mails, phone conversations, and face-to -face meetings to keep the process running smoothly.

Researchers using human participants must follow all guidelines set by the IRB. This includes the drafting, distributing, and collection of all informed consent forms. As the researcher, I had the responsibility of reporting all changes to the research to include completion of the research to the IRB. As the researcher, I ensured a safe environment for the participants, guarded the confidentiality of the participants, and supervised the research to ensure ethical standards were practiced.

As the researcher, I selected the participants. I selected six males who identified as African American and who graduated from a multiple-race, 4-year resident college or university within the past 2 years. I did not recruit participants with whom I had a personal relationship. I was responsible for the distribution and collection of the informed consent forms. I coordinated the interview time and place with the individual participant. Upon completion of the interviews the data will be stored for 5 years per the Walden University IRB application.

### **Research Design**

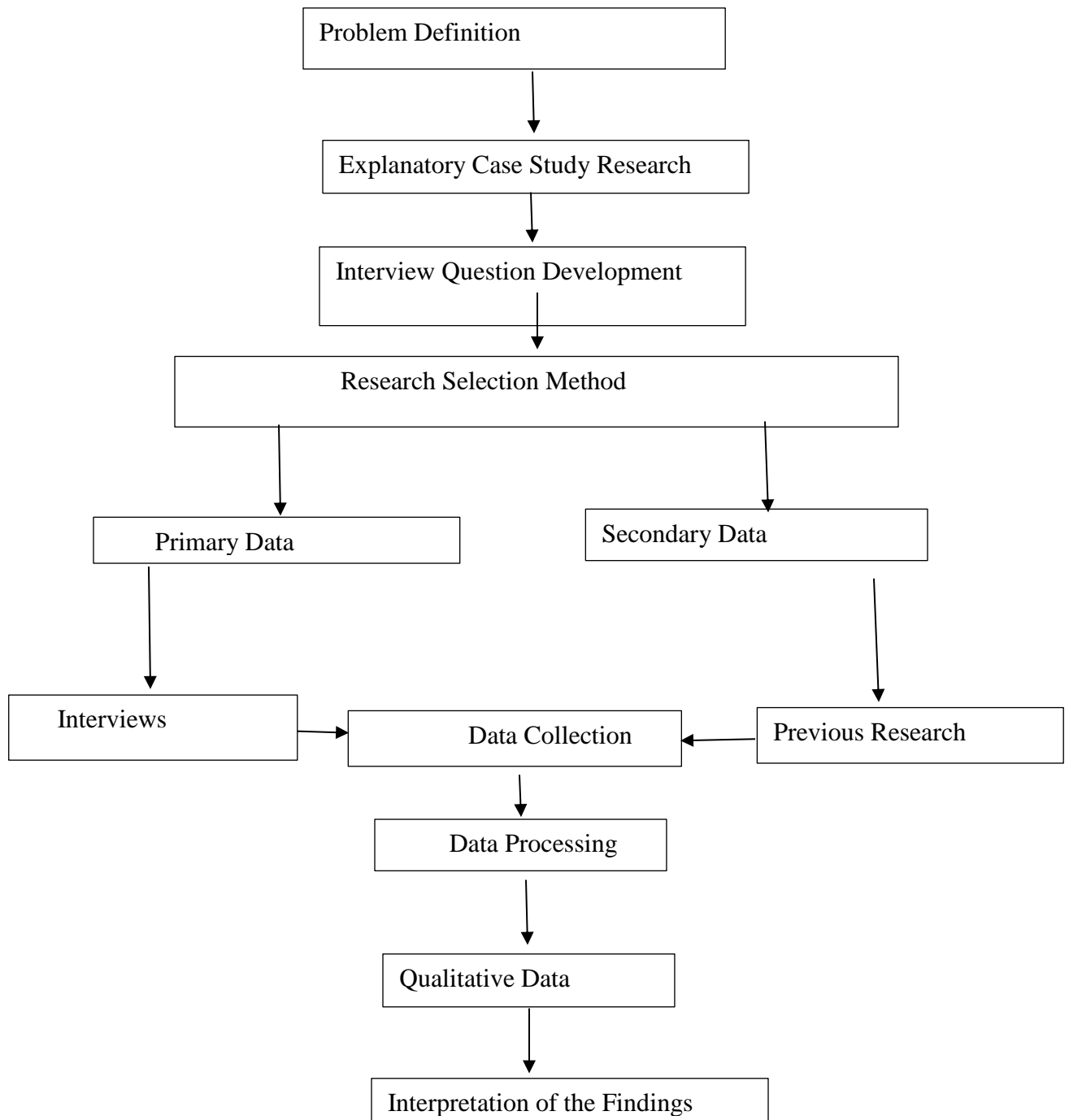
The research design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to the study's research questions and eventually to its conclusion (Tumele, 2015). For this study, I selected a qualitative research design using an explanatory, intensive, multiple case study method. Scholars use a case study to focus on the phenomenon in a real-life context and take an in-depth look at a small number of cases (Yin, 2012). The case study allowed me to gather data that is contextually unique. Harland (2014) suggested four

important points to case studies for new researchers: the potential of the case study, the forms of data that are acceptable, when the analysis stops, and what makes a quality case study. These pointers gave me the structure necessary to conduct a case study. I used a single subject of study with a multiple case study format. The multiple case study format allowed me to explore the phenomenon across different cases. This design was able to uncover situations that produce barriers with similar or contrasting results.

For this study, I considered three types of case study designs: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. In exploratory case studies, scholars look at the phenomenon before the research question are formed (Mills et al., 2010). In descriptive case studies, researchers follow a theory (Mills et al., 2010). I chose the explanatory case study because it is related to a theoretical position. The theoretical position for my study is that there are barriers to achieving a college degree from a multiple-race, 4-year college or university that African American males experience.

The explanatory case study method required an accurate description of the facts of the case studied. These facts developed my theoretical position about the phenomenon. The facts of the case assisted me in defining the case so that the relevant data could be collected. A case that is not well defined can lead to findings that are not about the case or, in multiple case studies, the individual cases are not in fact comparable (Harder, 2012). The explanatory method followed an outline or flowchart (Harder, 2012). The research process flowchart model in Figure 1 was used to keep me on track with the research process.





**Figure 1. Research process flowchart.**

During the participant interviews, I looked for experiences that the participants had that were consistent and inconsistent with the research identified in the literature review. Some examples of the research identified included achievement motivation, institutional racism, systematic racism, and stereotype threats. I looked for additional issues that arose from the key issues. The primary data collection tool was the semi structured interviews. Semi structured interviews are used for studying the participants' perceptions and opinions (Kallio, Pietila, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). The interview questions were open-ended questions and took a conversational approach to expand on the participants' perceptions based on the identified issues in Chapter 1

### **Data Collection**

In this section, I outline the criteria for participation inclusion and the method and framework for data collection. I explain how I selected the participants and the source of any secondary data necessary to answer the research questions. I outline the method of recording the data, how the data were provided, stored, and how the data were used. I explain the sample size, recruitment process, and instruments used to collect the data. I also addresses where and when the data were collected.

Data collection for this study came in the form of interviews and the U.S. Census Bureau. Interviews were the primary source of data collection while U.S. Census Bureau 2016 statistics was the secondary form of data collection. Although I used statistical data, this project was not a mixed-method study. The statistical data were used to support the descriptions of the facts that are required when doing an explanatory case study. The primary focus of the data collection process was the interviews. During the interviews, I

asked open-ended questions to give the participants a chance to elaborate on their experiences with the phenomenon. Open-ended questions and prompts let me know that the participants understood the phenomenon being studied. These questions and prompts were designed to build a two-way conversation between myself and the participant. These questions and prompts produced the additional data necessary for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon.

Each participant was interviewed individually. Separate interviews allowed the participants the freedom to express themselves without pressure or influence from other participants and gave each participant more time to elaborate on their perceptions, opinions, and feelings about the topic. Separate interviews allowed for confidentiality and helped answer the research questions.

To maintain structure and organization in the semi structured interview, an interview guide was used (Appendix B). The interview guide method was designed to develop a strategy that would include asking open-ended questions as well as a list of topics to be covered (Given, 2012). The interview guide was necessary while I used the semi structured interview method. Semi structured interviews are useful when the concepts and relationships with them were well understood (Given, 2012). There are some cautions in using the semi structured interviews. When asking open-ended questions, I was careful not to ask leading questions. Examples of leading question would have been to ask the benefit of attending a mixed-race college or university. By asking about the benefit I am leading the participants to form their answers only in a positive aspect of attending a mixed-race, 4-year college or university. One of my open-ended

question was how the participants would explain or evaluate their experience at a mixed-race college or university. Using open-ended questions helps to ensure interpretive validity (Given, 2012).

The participants for my study consisted of males who identified as African American and who graduated from a multiple-race, 4-year resident college or university within the past 2 years. The setting for the interviews were one-on-one and at a convenient time and location of the participants choosing. Recruitment of the participants was conducted by me. Participant recruitment was accomplished using correspondence through Survey Monkey (Appendix C). Locations for the interviews were coffee shops, campus buildings, and the participant's office. All locations were selected with confidentiality in mind.

The interview sessions were audio recorded for accurate analysis and coding. The time length of each interview session was at the discretion of the individual participant. The participant was seated across from me to maintain eye contact and observe the body language. I let the participants know that I would take notes as well as record the interview. At the end of the interview the participants were informed on how to access the study through ProQuest.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study followed all rules and regulations outlined by the Walden IRB. Exceptional care was taken as to do no harm to the participants, physically, mentally or emotionally. All participants took part in the study on a volunteer basis. All participants

could end the interview at any time. Participants were not paid a monetary sum for participating, nor were there any tangible incentives for participation.

Prior to conducting the interviews, participants read and signed an informed consent form. This form outlined the possible dangers of their participation along with a general outline of the research project. I used the informed consent template provided by the Walden University IRB (*see Appendix D*). I informed all participants of the nature of the study, its intent, purpose and its use.

Exceptional care was be taken to protect the participant's wellbeing, privacy and dignity (Shaw & Holland, 2014). The identity of the participants was kept confidential. Participants were identified by a numerical code assigned by me. Participants were assigned as participant 1, 2, 3 etc. Participants were not identified by name in the study. This strategy helped to support confidentiality. Upon arrival to the interview site, the participants were briefed on all potential dangers of the interview as described in the informed consent form. Participants reserved the right to cancel their interview appointment at any time.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the data, I used a holistic analysis. A holistic analysis focus on the entire case rather than a specific aspect as with an embedded analysis. A holistic content analysis retains the temporal dimension of everyone's story so that the parts within the story are interpreted in relation to other parts of the story and the outcome of the story (Beal, 2013). Each participant shared a different story based on how they perceived the

internal and external barriers to education. These perceptions of the barriers were analyzed and coded for comparison.

For this qualitative research project, I chose to use two core aspects of qualitative data analysis: coding, and developing themes (Belotto, 2018). The recorded interviews were transcribed so that similar meanings may be coded (Belotto, 2018). Coding allowed me to group the data into themes. The themes were analyzed to help answer the research questions.

To document and code, the data, I used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis. Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis is useful in search and recovery of data, representation of data, summarizing and interpretation of themes, and exploration of meanings and patterns found in data (Mills et al., 2010). There are several software tools available for qualitative data analysis. I chose to use NVivo software. NVivo is a software developed by QSR International for qualitative data analysis. It allows researchers to store and analyze unstructured data. (Phillips, Margaret, & Jing Lu, 2018). Since I used a coding method of data analysis, the NVivo software provided the tools necessary to code the data. Some of the advantages to coding with NVivo was that it allowed me to modify the codes as needed. This means that the codes were able to be renamed, rearranged, split, combined, and content recoded depending on how the project proceeded (Salkind, 2010)

This method was consistent with the framework of my data collection. I used semi-structured interviews because of the flexibility in collecting the data and NVivo because of the flexibility in the data analysis. Since the codes came from the text, I was

able to display the entire text for clarification. Since I interviewed multiple participants, NVivo allowed me to prepare the data with headings to identify the different themes.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 outlined the research design for the study. I used a qualitative explanatory intensive multiple case study strategy. This provided me with the in-depth study of the barriers of education experienced by African American males. The IRB has approved the application for this study with an IRB approval number of 07-23-18-0440707. After I received the IRB approval, I interviewed African American male college graduates to explore the possibilities of barriers to their education. The data was coded, and themes were developed to answer the research questions. The number of participants accumulated until I reached a point of saturation. The findings of this study uncovered the need for conducting future research on African American male education.

## Chapter 4 Results

### **Introduction**

The college graduation rates of African American males have decreased by 7.9% in 6-year cohort increments starting from 1996 to the last reported 6-year cohort in 2010 with 90% or more being accepted to college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Although the rates of African American males' college graduation have increased, their graduation rate is still 23.6% lower than European American males, 12.8% lower than Hispanic American males, 28.3% lower than Asian American males, and 0.2% lower than American Indian/ Alaskan Native males (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

The purpose of the study was to explore the strategies used by African American males to overcome the barriers to earning a college degree from a mixed-race, 4-year resident college or university. The findings from this study may be used for additional research into the barriers faced by African American males. The strategies used by the participants may help reduce the gap in graduation rates for African American males

### **Research Questions**

To explore the strategies used by African American males to overcome the perceived barriers to higher education, semi structured interviews were conducted to answer these research questions:

RQ1. How did African American male college graduates overcome perceived barriers to education so they can graduate from a multiple-race, 4-year resident college or university?



RQ2. What are the perceived barriers to graduation faced by African American male graduates from a multiple-race, 4-year resident college or university?

### **Procedure**

Male college graduates who self-identified as African American were recruited through social media invitations and referrals. An invitation to participate was posted to social media sites LinkedIn and Facebook. Participants were asked to respond to the social media invitation (see Appendix A) and complete the Survey Monkey questionnaire. A snowball style recruiting practice was also used. Participants were asked to refer other participants they felt fit the criteria for participation. Several participants were referred by the participants who responded to the social media invitation. Nine potential participants expressed interest in the study. Of the nine original potential participants, six African American male college graduates participated in the study. The others did not meet the criteria for participation. One potential participant did not live in the geographical area designated for recruitment. One potential participant graduated from a HBCU and not a mixed-race, 4-year resident college or university. One potential participant graduated outside of the 2-year graduation time frame that I set for participant eligibility.

### **Setting**

The participants were free to choose the day, time, and location of their interview. Interviews were conducted in auto dealerships, college campus classrooms, and offices. The significance of the study was explained to every participant upon arrival to the interview. Participants were then given the informed consent form to read and sign.

Participants were also given an overview of the study. I answered all questions and clarified all concerns the participants had pertaining to the study. Participants were informed of the potential length of the interview and that the interview would be audio recorded along with me taking notes. Participants were informed that they had the right to decline to answer any question and could end the interview at any time.

Once the interview started, open-ended questions were asked using an interview guide. The answers were recorded using the voice recorder on my smart phone. I also took notes on body language, facial expression, and voice tone. After the interviews, the participants were given a copy of the consent form, and the procedure to access the study was explained. The notes were placed in a folder and locked in a file cabinet in my home office.

### **Demographics**

The six African American male college graduate participants were recruited from the Savannah, Georgia and Beaufort, South Carolina area. This area is home to Fort Stewart Army Base, Hunter Army Airfield, and Paris Island Marine Corps Recruit Depot. Five of the six participants were military veterans. Four participants were U.S. Army veterans, one was a U.S. Navy veteran, and one was a track and field college athlete on full scholarship. The participants hold bachelor's degrees in communications, business and criminal justice. Three of the participants answered the social media invitation, and three participants were recruited through referrals. Three participants were employed, and three participants were unemployed. Two participants were actively seeking employment

One participant was not in search of employment. None of the participants who were employed were employed in their field of study.

All participants were scheduled for an interview in which they chose the time and place. All participants self-identified as an African American male and graduated from a mixed-race, 4-year resident college or university within the past 2 years. One participant graduated from a college outside of the State of Georgia. Table 1 represents the demographics of the participants.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Study Participants*

Participant	Year Graduated	Demographics
Participant 1	2016	Student Athlete
Participant 2	2018	Military Veteran
Participant 3	2017	Military Veteran
Participant 4	2018	Military Veteran
Participant 5	2018	Military Veteran
Participant 6	2018	Military Veteran

### **Data Collection**

The data were collected using semi structured interview questions and an interview guide. Interviews give the most direct and straightforward approach to gathering detailed and rich data regarding a phenomenon (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). I asked open-ended questions and follow-up questions to allow the participant to elaborate on certain topics. The questions consisted of a main question, sub question, and additional probe question to gather additional data on certain topics. This semi structured interview style allowed me to look at the core elements of the phenomenon while the participants gave an in-depth look into their college experiences. This style of interview allowed me to have a good understanding of each participant's personal college experience.

Students were asked about their family education history, the barriers they encountered, the support systems that were available, and the support systems they used. The participants described the strategies and actions they took to overcome the barriers. Each participant told their account of their college experience with some similarities to other participants and consistencies with the literature review. Each interview was recorded using a smart phone. I took additional notes on the interview guide. The interview guide was developed by me with the direction of my research committee. The consent form and the interview guide with notes were filed in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. The recorded interview is secured by a passcode and face recognition. The interviews ended with the participants making a recommendation for success to other African American males who are entering college.

### **Data Analysis**

For this case study, the data were analyzed using a holistic content analysis. A holistic-content analysis is used to retain the temporal dimension of everyone's story so that the parts within the story are interpreted in relation to other parts of the story and the outcome of the story (Beal, 2013). Critical race theory was used to analyze the data for signs of a social construct that would lead to institutional discriminatory practices. The collected data from the interviews were transcribed by me and coded using NVivo software. The transcription allowed me to go back and identify key phrases and words that were found to be relevant in more than one group. For example, Participant 2 shared that his family was a barrier because his responsibilities to his family made it difficult to attend classes and block off study time. Participant 2 also identified his family as a support system. He and his wife created a family schedule that would allow both to attend college. The children supported his education with votes of confidence and group homework sessions. Participants 5 and 6 categorized their family as a source of support. These students, along with their family, created schedules for household responsibilities and were supported through tutoring and encouragement. The parents' influences were also analyzed for effectiveness in the degree attainment of African American males. Participants 1 and 3 stated that their fathers influenced their success in earning their degrees. This is consistent with the Odom and McNeese (2014) who revealed parenting practices influenced African American males to complete their college degrees.

I replayed the audio recording of each interview several times to ensure that vital information to my study was not overlooked. The NVivo software allowed me to group

similarities in the responses to the interview questions. Creating groups allowed me to identify themes. Once the themes were identified, I was able to organize the similarities and differences in those themes that allowed me to identify the subthemes. I identified similar phrases and words used by the participants to create the subthemes. I ran queries using the NVivo software that coded the data collected from the answers to the research questions. From the interview responses, I identified eight themes and four subthemes. The themes were identified from consistencies in the participants' interviews. Subthemes were similarities between a smaller number of participants or a single participant.

### **Theme 1: Barriers**

The focus of the study was to identify the barriers to higher education experienced by African American males. Through a probe into each participant's college experience, I was able to identify their biggest perceived barriers. Three of the six participants identified their family schedule as their biggest barrier. The participants indicated that the time they spent on family obligations hindered their education obligations. The following issues were identified as family schedule barriers: (a) the participant's and the spouse's work schedules, (b) child activities and family responsibilities, and (c) nonsupport from family. The other three participants identified barriers of disability, class modality, and focus.

#### **Family Schedule**

The biggest barrier identified by most participants was the family schedule. Five of the six participants were fathers, and four were husbands and fathers. Through the interviews I found that family responsibilities such as activities for the children,

household chores, and spending quality family time made attending class and completing assignments difficult. Participant 2 stated:

My wife and I were both in school, so we had to develop a schedule to be successful. The schedule covered who would pick up the kids from their activities on certain days to who would cook dinner. If it weren't for the schedule it would have been difficult to be successful in school. Communication was our key to success.

### **Disability**

Four participants used the Military Vocational Rehabilitation program to fund their education. This indicated that they had a service-related disability. Participant 4 distinctly labeled his disability as a barrier. Participant 4 suffered an accident that resulted in the loss of his right arm and part of his left leg. Participant 4 received encouragement from the faculty and staff to complete his degree. Participant 4 shared:

I woke up in the hospital with this new life that I had no idea of how to handle. I had to learn to write with my left hand and it was taking me longer to complete tests and assignments. Family members had concerns about me completing school and suggested that I drop my classes and just take the disability money.

### **Class Modality**

Participant 5 identified class modality as his barrier. Participant 5 attended a university that changed the class modality for his program. He began his program with ground classes but at the end of his program he learned that he would have to take the remaining classes in an online format. The change in modality was a difficult transition for him. Participant 5 stated, "I had never taken online classes and was very nervous

about the effect it would have on my grade point average. My wife helped me through the online classes.” Participant 5 stated that he contributed to his own class modality barrier as he was against the online format once it was introduced.

### **Focus**

Participant 1 identified focus as his biggest barrier. Participant 1 was single and a college athlete. Participant 1 stated that he had an issue with focus and adjusting to college life. His grades suffered, and he lost his scholarship. Participant 1 stated he was more interested in women and parties than studying. He was displaying the stereotype of African American males identified by Harper (2016). Harper found that some of the stereotypes attached to African American males are a lack of academic skills, a need for remedial instruction, and more interest in extracurricular activities than education. Through the support of his family and friends he regained his focus, his scholarship, and completed his degree.

### **Theme 2: Support System**

All participants identified a support system that played a part in their college career. The participants identified their family, classmates, and faculty and staff as having a role in their support system. Each participant identified a main support entity and other support personnel. Three participants described family as the main entity in their support system. Two participants stated that classmates were their main support system, and one participant described the faculty and staff as his main support system. Of the three support systems mentioned, all but one participant mentioned family as a support system in some capacity.



**Father**

All participants who identified a parent as either a main source of support; an alternate source of support identified their father as a main parent of support. This finding supports the Baker (2014) study on the positive effects of the African American father involvement in the academic success of the children. Participant 3 identified his father as his only support. He stated that his father instilled discipline in him that helped him complete his degree despite his marital troubles. Participant 1 identified his father as his support system and his motivation for completing his degree. Participant 1 shared the experience with his father after he lost his scholarship and was put on probation:

I got caught up in the parties and girls. My GPA dropped to a 1.8 and I lost my scholarship and was placed on probation. I had a choice of either go home and live with my parents or take college seriously. Through some tough love and talks with my father I was able to prioritize. My father had a child while he was in college and had to drop out and join the Army. He was my support system with tough love. I wanted to complete my degree for my father.

**Spouse**

Four participants were married but only Participants 2 and 5 identified their spouse as a source of support. Participant 2 identified communication as the foundation of the support from his spouse. Participant 2 shared that, with the support of his spouse, they were able to form a schedule that would allow both to take care of family responsibilities such as picking up the children from school and activities, doing the shopping, and household chores. Participant 2 stated that the continuous communication

he and his spouse had also strengthened their relationship. Participant 5 turned to his spouse for support with the online classes. Participant 5 stated, "I had never taken online classes before and was very concern about how well I would do. I turned to my wife for comfort, reassurance and advice. She told me that we will get through this together."

### **Faculty and Staff**

Participant 4 identified the faculty and staff as his support system. Participant 4 shared that he needed additional help from the school to complete his degree. Because he lost his right hand he had to learn to write with his left hand. As a result of this disability he was allotted extra time on tests and assignments. Participant 4 shared his views on not only school but life as well:

I was angry, I made it through several deployments, and I come home, and this guy ran me over. I woke up in the hospital with an arm that did not work and part of a leg. I did not want to continue with school but then I got a call from an enrollment counselor who was calling students who had not been in school for a while. I talked with him and it felt that he had a general concern for me. Not for a quota but for me. He asked me to come and talk to him. He explained the support that was available to me through the school and by the time I left I was back in school.

The support Participant 4 received from the university is consistent with the findings of Butler-Barnes et al. (2012). Butler-Barnes studied the educational utility beliefs of African American males and indicate that students with more positive educational utility beliefs are more likely to invest their time and efforts in school and to persist on

academic tasks in the face of challenge. I stopped reviewing here. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at Chapter 5.

### **Theme 3: Resilience**

Of the six participants, two stated they never considered withdrawing from school. Two participants considered dropping out due to academic issues. Two participants withdrew from school and re-enrolled years later. There are many reasons why an African American male student would consider withdrawing from school. The participant's level of achievement motivation, resilience and self-determination were discovered to be key factors in each participant's decision to stay in school or withdraw.

#### **Never Considered Withdrawal**

Participants 2 and 3 stated that they never considered withdrawing from school. Participant 2 shared that he and his wife created a schedule that would allow both to attend school and still manage the household duties. With an understanding of his role within the household, participant 2 was able to have a structure that he felt comfortable with. He displayed a high level of achievement motivation. This allowed him to concentrate on school assignments and know that his family would not be neglected due to his pursuit of his degree.

Participant 3 shared that his education was supported by his parents but not his spouse. Participant 3 stated

My father tried to instilled discipline in me, but the streets were more attractive than school. While I was married my wife did not support my efforts to earn my degree. I had to use self-determination and self-discipline to finish my degree.

Participant 2 shared that self -determination was the motivating factor for him.

### **Considered Withdrawal**

Participants 1and 5 considered withdrawing from school. Participant 1 considered withdrawing during his freshman year. During his freshman year his GPA dropped to a 1.86 and he lost his athletic scholarship. The decline in his GPA was a result of his lack of focus.

Participant 1 also displayed a lack of education resilience. Education resilience is defined as the ability of students to succeed academically, despite the life circumstances and risk factors that prevent them from succeeding (Hargrove & Kim, 2013). Participant 1 used his support system to strengthen his education resilience, regain his focus, and complete his degree.

Participant 5 considered withdrawing when his university changed the modality of his program. The program switched from a face to face modality to a hybrid /face to face modality. Participant 5 completed an associate degree in a face to face modality and was comfortable with that format. He shared his experience with the hybrid-online / face-to-face modality:

I had never taken an online class and was very nervous and uncomfortable about online classes. I had a 3.5 GPA and was convinced that online classes would damage my GPA. Part of the problem was I had it in my head that I would not be

successful with the online portion of the program. I sought support from the university student support center. They provided me with online tutorials that gave me best practices on navigating online courses.

Participant 5 displayed a clear lack of achievement motivation. It was not until he reached out for support that he became comfortable with the new modality and was able to complete his degree.

### **Withdrew**

Participants 4 and 6 withdrew from school and reentered years later. Participant 4 overcame physical and mental barriers that if not addressed may have stopped him from earning his degree. Participant 4 relied on the support of the university to help him overcome his physical barriers. Due to his accident his family was not supportive of him returning to school and questioned his ability to complete the degree. Participant 4 is a first-generation college graduate. His mother earned her high school diploma in night school and his father dropped out of school in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. This is consistent with the study of Puchner and Markowitz (2015) who studied the value that African Americans place on education. The lack of support from his family may be linked to their own academic issues. Participant 4 did receive support from the faculty and staff. He was allowed extra time on tests and was given a dictation device to help him take notes. The support that participant 4 received increased his achievement motivation to the extent that he was not only able to complete his bachelor's degree but enroll directly into his master's degree program.

Participant 6 withdrew from school during his freshman year. He joined the U.S. Army where he served 22 years of active duty service. After retiring from the U.S. Army, he returned to school to complete his degree. Participant 6 shared that he has all grown children and it was the right time to come back to school. Once he returned, he had no intention of withdrawing again.

#### **Theme 4: Motivation**

Achievement motivation combined with field theory and stereotype threat combined to form the theoretical framework for this study. Motivation may be thought of as the persistent effort to perform a task and achieve desired results. Each participant identified what motivated them to pursue and earn their college degree. The findings in the motivation theme created two sub themes: family and self-motivation. Participant 1 identified family as his source of motivation. Participants 2, 3, and 6 identified self-motivation as their source of motivation. Participant 5 identified both family and self-motivation as his source of motivation.

##### **Family**

Participant 1 identified his family as his source of motivation. Both of his parents attended college, but he specifically identified his father as the motivational source. Participant 1 stated “I wanted to make my father proud.” Participant 1 is also the only participant who has never been married and does not have children.

##### **Self-motivation**

Participants 2, 3, 4, and 6 identified self-motivation as their source of motivation. Participant 2 has a spouse and children but did not identify them as a motivational source.

Participant 3 stated that his wife was not supportive due to issues within the marriage. He used his marital issues as a self-motivator to complete college. Participant 4 used his disability as a self-motivator to complete his degree. Participant 4 stated:

I could not let my disability, or my race become a barrier.

Participant 6 returned to school after he retired from military service. Participant 6 was not looking for a career. He and his wife were comfortable in military retirement. He stated that he was self-motivated to complete his degree but did say his grandson was also a source of motivation.

### **Theme 5: Funding**

The participants funded their education through six different sources: Post 911/Montgomery GI Bill, Military Vocational Rehabilitation, South Carolina Athletic Scholarship, Pell Grants, The Transition School to Work program (TSW), and The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). All the participants used military education benefits. Participant 1 is the only one who received an athletic scholarship. Participant 1 used his father's GI Bill after losing his scholarship for poor academic performance. Active duty service members, retirees, or prior service veterans may gift part or all their Post911/GI Bill to their spouse or biological / adopted children.

Participant 2 used his Post 911/GI Bill to fund his education. He is the only participant that used one source of funding for his education. Participant 3 used Military Vocational Rehabilitation, FAFSA and the Post 911/GI Bill. Participant 3 shared his experience with Military Vocational Rehabilitation:

Vocational Rehabilitation was good. The housing allowance was more, the books were paid for, and the supplies were paid for. There was no cap on what Vocational Rehabilitation would pay for as far as supplies. The process was relatively easy. They looked for careers that you could do based on your disabilities. The Vocational Rehabilitation counselors play a big role in the career that you choose.

Participant 4 funded his education through Military Vocational Rehabilitation, Post 911/GI Bill, and TSW. Because of the severity of his disability, he was eligible for loan forgiveness through Military Vocational Rehabilitation. Participant 5 used Military Vocational Rehabilitation to complete his degree. He gifted portions of his Post 911/GI Bill to his son and wife. Participant 5 explained his understanding of Military Vocational Rehabilitation:

Voc Rehab has to assess if there is a need for you to go to school. People think they can just go there, and they will pay for school, that is not how it works. They are there to find you employment. If you need to go to school to gain employment, then they look at school.

Participant 6 funded his education through Pell Grants, Loans, and Post 911/Montgomery GI Bill.

### **Theme 6: Preparation for College**

Participants 1 and 6 identified as being well prepared for college. Participant 1 shared that his college preparation came from his guidance counselor along with his



teachers. Participant 6 went into more detail about his college preparation. Participant 6 stated:

We had the upward bound program in South Carolina. The upward bound program focused on you going to college. It's set up to teach kids about college Math, English, and Science. It also teaches you to work toward your goals.

Participants 2, 4, and 5 identified their high schools as being non-supportive and did not prepare them for college. Participant 5 shared:

My high school was predominantly African American and was not very supportive. It felt that the school just pushed us through.

Participant 3 did not take advantage of the opportunities for college preparation that were offered in his high school. Participant 3 shared that he was a product of his environment. He shared that the streets were more attractive than school. He was looking at alternative routes to make fast money. Participant 4 did not identify any specific institution that prepared him or did not prepare him for college.

### **Theme 7: Racial Issues**

Participants 1 and 3 were the only participants to identify negative racial issues in their college. Participant 1 stated:

I ran track, so everyone knew who I was, I added value to the school. If I did not run track things may have been different. My best friend who was not on a team got into a few altercations. There were aggressions against him with things like name calling that resulted in fighting.

Participant 3 shared his experience and thoughts on the racial tone of his school.

Participant 3 stated:

Everywhere, whether people want to acknowledge it or not, being African American always has a bearing on what you do. 1. The perception people have of African Americans and 2. How you present yourself. When I first came to school, I had the whole Miami look going. I was looking like a thug. I then became a work study and was involved in a lot of projects and activities in the school and my experienced changed for the better.

### **Theme 8: First Generation College Graduate**

Participant 2 is the only participant who identifies as not being a first-generation college graduate. Participant 2 stated:

Both of my parents have college degrees. There were not many males around me that had gone to college. Most thought that once they got a job they were set.

Participant 1 shared that he was a first-generation college graduate. Both of his parents were military veterans and neither completed college. He said he liked to think that he had an influence on his little sister. She is 15 and already has her school picked out.

Participant 3 is a first-generation college graduate. After he graduated his sister graduated right behind him. His parents understood the importance of attending school but were not able to attend.

Participant 5 is a first-generation college graduate. He stated, "I broke the mold." His wife is in a doctoral program for Human Resources. He shared that he and his wife

have influenced their children. His daughter has a PSAT score of 1200 and is taking it again to improve that score.

Participant 6 stated that he is a first-generation college graduate. His sister graduated college after him and then various cousins followed her. Participant 6 said “It was like a competition between us.

Participant 4 stated: I am a first-generation college graduate. My mother finished high school in night school. My dad is Haitian, and he went as far as the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. His focus was on working and earning money.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 identified the findings from 6 semi-structured interviews coded into themes and subthemes for analysis to answer the following research questions:

1. How did African American male college graduates overcome perceived barriers to education, so they can graduate from a multiple-race four-year resident college or university?
2. What are the perceived barriers to graduation faced by African American male graduates from a multiple-race four-year resident college or university?

To answer the research questions the participants were asked to elaborate on their college experience. The participants gave their account of the barriers they faced, the support systems that helped them overcome the barriers and their motivation to complete their college degree.

Chapter 5 explores the findings from the participant's interviews. I also explore the participant's advice and strategies for success for other African American males entering college. I analyze the experiences of each participant as they relate to the literature review and I discuss recommendations for social change.

## Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

African American males are subject to stereotype threats, lack of achievement motivation, funding, and support systems that may affect their efforts in earning a college degree. African American males may not have received the proper preparation or secured the proper resources necessary to be successful in college. In the findings of this study, I identified consistencies between the participants' college experiences and studies addressed in the literature review. I found that some of the participants experienced many of the same barriers while also introducing new barriers not identified in the literature review. The purpose of this study was to answer these research questions:

RQ: How did African American male college graduates overcome the perceived barriers to education, so they can graduate from a multiple-race, 4-year resident college or university?

RQ: What are the perceived barriers to graduation faced by African American male graduates from a multiple-race, 4-year resident college or university?

Six African American male college graduates participated in this study to share their college experiences and strategies used to earn their degrees.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The findings discussed in this chapter are the result of six semi structured interviews from which I identified eight themes and 4 sub themes. The themes are (a) barriers to earning a degree, (b) the support systems, (c) resilience, (d) motivation, (e) funding for college, (f) preparation for college, (g) racial issues, and (h) first-generation

college graduate. The subthemes were (a) disability, (b) faculty and staff, (c) family, and (d) self-motivation.

### **Barriers to Earning a Degree**

Education barriers were experienced both internally and externally. Internal barriers consisted of the students' achievement motivation. External barriers consisted of time, support, and funding. There were systems in place for these participants that helped them to overcome the external barriers. The participants took advantage of military benefits, scholarships, and federal financial aid to fund their education. I found that the participants' family, university faculty and staff, and self-determination provided the support system necessary to complete their degree. Three participants identified the family schedule as a barrier, and the strategy to overcome that barrier was found in using time management by making personal schedules for family and personnel responsibilities. Two participants identified support as a barrier, and the strategy to overcome that barrier these participants used self-motivation by setting goals. One participant identified funding as a barrier but was able to overcome that barrier through his parent's resources.

I found that internal barriers required different strategies to overcome than the external barriers. An internal barrier experienced by most participants was a lack of achievement motivation pertaining to earning a college degree. Achievement motivation is developed through past experiences with a certain task and how well the individual performed at that task. The findings from this study pertaining to achievement motivation are consistent with Kretchmar's (2016) study of achievement motivation. Kretchmar

discovered that past experiences will determine how the individual values the outcome of a task and how that individual perceives his or her ability to succeed in performing that task. To overcome the internal barriers, the student must develop a change of the task expectations. The participants used their support systems to help them achieve success with difficult tasks and gain confidence in their abilities to perform the task. The external barriers identified in this study consisted of disability, program modalities, cost, and family responsibilities. To overcome the external barriers, participants relied on their support systems, resilience, motivation, and government needs-based aid. Each participant identified an internal or external barrier they faced. Table 2 shows the barrier and the strategy used to overcome the barrier.

**Table 2**

*Summary of Strategies for Success*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Strategy for Success</b>
Participant 1	Focus	Support System in the home
Participant 2	Family Schedule	Support System in the home / Resilience
Participant 3	Family Schedule	Self- Motivation
Participant 4	Disability	Support System in the university
Participant 5	Class Modality	Support System in the home
Participant 6	Family Schedule	Support System in the home

## **Support Systems**

I found that the participants benefited from a support system that helped them earn their college degree. The support systems identified by the participants included family, classmates, and university faculty and staff. The participants who identified family as either a main source of support or an alternate source of support identified their father as a main parent of support. This finding aligned with Baker (2014) studies on the positive effects of the African American father involvement in the academic success of the children. Participant 3 identified his father as his only support system. He stated that his father instilled discipline in him that helped him complete his degree despite his marital troubles. Participant 1 identified his father as his support system and his motivation for completing his degree after he lost his scholarship and was placed on academic probation.

## **Resilience**

African American males continue to graduate from college at a lower rate than other male ethnic groups. When analyzing the variance in the graduation rates between ethnic groups, researchers must take into consideration how resilience is perceived by the individual and others. Participants shared their reasons for considering withdrawing from school and what kept them in school. The participants identified a lack of social support, funding, access to new technology, and perceived competence from faculty members. Through the course of the interviews, all but one participant stated that they relied on their support system.



Some African American students found themselves motivated to become a support system to other students. Participant 5 explained how he would see students in the hall and lend encouraging remarks such as “let’s go get it today.” Simple words of encouragement can promote resilience in another student. To help close the gap in graduation rates, students must learn that they will encounter issues and adversity, but a strong support system will influence the completion of their college degree.

### **Motivation**

The participants identified several motivating factors that helped them earn their college degree. Kretchmar (2016) recognized two theories of motivation that are consistent with the motivation factors that the participants identified. These theories are: intrinsic motivation and achievement motivation. Intrinsic motivation is defined as motivation to engage in an activity for its own sake (Kretchmar, 2016). Achievement motivation refers to a person's motivation to perform difficult tasks to the best of their ability (Kretchmar, 2016). Achievement motivation is part of the theoretical framework for the study. The participants increased their achievement motivation by overcoming their barriers. As the participants worked through their issues, they strengthened their resilience and motivation.

Scholars outlined several issues that hindered the motivation of African American male students in pursuit of their college degree. Issues such as racism, lack of positive role models, and a lack of high expectations from their teachers are issues that affect the degree progress of African American males. One consistent factor of motivation with all participants was their family. Participant 1 lost his scholarship, but with his father’s

guidance, he was able to see the importance of education and continue attending school with a new focus. The rest of the participants came from families with modest earnings. These participants used their own socioeconomic resources such as joining the military and the commitment to the welfare of their families as motivation to earn their degree. I stopped reviewing here. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at your references.

### **Funding for College**

All participants used some form of military benefits to help fund their education. Participant 1 also used a merit-based aid in the form of an athletic scholarship. Merit based aid is awarded disproportionately to students from higher income families. Along with military benefits participants used needs-based aid in the form of government student loans and the university's work study program to help fund their education. Participants who received military disability payments also used the Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab) program. This is a program that is designed to help service members with a service-connected disability find employment. If the Voc Rehab counselor concludes that the service member needs additional education to secure employment, the counselor will authorize the funds necessary to secure the necessary education. Using military benefits has allowed the participants to avoid large amounts of student loan debt. These benefits helped because over the last decade public university tuition has risen 42% and the cost of private universities has risen 31% (Zhan, Xiang, & Elliott, 2018). Not all students use military benefits, merit-based aid, or have the socioeconomic resources to fund their college education.

### **College Preparation**

The preparation for college is important to the success of the student.

Participants 1 and 6 were the only participants to acknowledge that they were properly prepared for college academically. Participant 1 received college preparation from his teachers and guidance counselors. Participant 6 participated in Upward Bound, a college prep program for high school students. None of the participants acknowledged being academically incompetent to complete college but some expressed that the preparation for college through their high school could have been better. The findings showed that the participant's behavior and GPAs revealed a lack of preparedness for college in their freshmen year. College preparation must include the skills and resources necessary to not only navigate the course work but navigate college life. Participant 1 was the only one to enter college directly after high school and graduate without a break in enrollment.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The following are the limitations of this study:

- The findings of the study are limited because the sample size only included 6 participants. The data collected from the interviews were beginning to repeat. At this point the data reached a point of saturation.
- The recruitment area covered 3 military posts. This resulted in 5 of the 6 participants being military veterans. Because of their military education benefits funding for these participants may be different than funding for a non-military student.

- The interviews were an account of the individual's college experience. The participants may have embellished on some of their responses to make the interview more colorful.
- There are other college situations for African American male students such as: student loans, fraternity membership and students raised in a single parent home. The findings of the study are limited to the scope of the participants and does not represent the entire African American community.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Administration Student Support**

Participants from this study stated that they received support from the faculty and staff of their respected schools. Below are some recommendations that I compiled that may be helpful for school administrators.

1. A tutoring center that has the tutoring fee included in the tuition. The tutoring center should include professional tutors, students, and faculty as tutors.
2. Tutoring was most consistently perceived to impact understanding of the course material, to improve work on assignments, and to increase confidence in students (Colver & Fry, 2016).
3. The findings from this study show that the participant's issues started in the beginning of their college career. An in-school mentoring program for freshman and sophomores may be beneficial to first time college students. Mentoring has been connected to increased college retention for ethnic minority students at predominantly White institutions (Dahlvig, 2010)

4. Mentoring may also contribute to career advancement, personal support, and role modeling (Dahlvig, 2010).
5. Participants 3, 4, and 5 identified the faculty and staff as part of their support system. An open-door policy adopted by all faculty and staff may help students understand the issues they may have while attending college. Participant 4 stated that the faculty and staff were supportive in helping him overcome the barriers to his education. An open-door policy portrays accessibility and approachability,
6. A blended course modality or hybrid courses. students may benefit from the flexibility of online as well as classroom instruction. All but 1 of the participants in this study were working adults. Online courses allowed them to take more classes as they were able to attend class in the classroom as well as online. Hybrid courses blend both the traditional classroom modality with the online modality. The general attributes of the hybrid modality are students working in small groups solving problems, encouraging student groups to work as collaborative teams, and instructors facilitating problem-solving processes without specifically directing the process (Gordon, Barnes, & Martin, 2009).
7. Career Service workshops focused on resume writing, and interview skills. The primary function of the university career service department is to facilitate the transition from education to work. (Hudson, Klein-Collins

8. Counsel for Adult and Experimental Learning, 2018). The career services department is a part of the university support system.
9. According to the Defense Manpower Data Center (2019) the total number of United States service members as of 2/28/2019 was 1,359,685. These service members may be eligible for the Post 911/GI Bill. Given the high number of military personnel, universities and colleges would benefit from staff members who are knowledgeable on military and state education benefits.
10. A work study program. The study by Scott-Clayton and Minaya found that Federal Work Study participation increases the likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree within six years by 3 percentage points (Scott-Clayton, Zhou, & CAPSEE, 2017). African American males have the lowest undergraduate college graduation rates of White, Asian, and Hispanic males (U.S Department of Education, 2017). A work Study program may help close the gap in degree attainment between the ethnic groups.

### **Strategies for Success**

There have been several strategies for the improvement of the African American male graduation rates that focused on the African American males' academic preparation for college. President George W. Bush and the Secretary of Education Margarete Spellings initiated legislation of single sex education as a public-school option. Travis Jr. and Ausbrooks (2012) studied a strategy that involved using higher education, public health, and even hip-hop culture to stimulate academic success. Dwarte (2014) conducted a study on the effectiveness of single sex schools. In this study the researchers found that

by the time they reach high school 42% of African American boys have failed at least one grade level (Dwarte 2014). W.E.B Dubois conducted a study on separate schools for African American males because African Americans had a propensity to desire wealth and status over racial uplift (Jones, 2014). The argument being that African American males who are enrolled in a mixed education atmosphere are subject to teachers who have biases towards the academic abilities of African American students. Teacher expectations are typically lower for low-income and African American students than for middle- and upper-income white students (Hubbard & Datnow, 2005). Butler-Barnes et al. (2012) conducted a study on the African American male's educational utility beliefs. The researchers focused on the positive achievement motivations of African American males. These studies focused on building the ethnic identity and self-esteem of African American males but not what to expect when they enter college and how to conduct themselves so that they can transition from high school to college emotionally and socially. This study identified several participants as first-generation college graduates. This suggests that the participants did not receive experienced based advice on navigating through college in the home. A look into the effectiveness of mentoring programs, training for school guidance counselors, and college preparation workshops for parents beginning in the African American males' middle school years may help sustain the positive practices necessary for being successful in college.

### **Future Research**

The findings of this study show a need for additional research based on the strengths and limitations of the study. This study used a qualitative research model. A

quantitative research approach would allow me to explore the African American males' perception to the barriers of higher education through the experiences of more participants from other demographic regions. Quantitative methods focus on the numerical data and measurable variables (Park & Park, 2016). Upon completion of the study I gained insight into the barriers to higher education faced by African American male college graduates from a mixed-race four-year resident university. The findings of the study revealed that additional research using African American males who have enrolled into a mixed-race four-year resident university but failed to earn their degree. Additional research opportunities were uncovered in the areas of being prepared for college. For example, the findings from this study show that the participants made poor judgments early in their college careers. This shows a need for further study into the programs that are available for African American male students while in high school and college that will focus on the academic best practices for being successful in overcoming barriers and earning a college degree.

### **Participants' Advice**

The participants from the study gave their advice for strategies for success that they felt would be beneficial for other African American males as they enter college.

Participant 1 advised students:

Find a major that you enjoy, just don't go to school to go to school and stay focused.

Participant 2 advised students:



Stay focused and have a backup plan. Use your resources like tutoring and most important communicate with your professor.

Participant 3 advised students:

I pushed for an education because the life you see on the TV and in the videos is not a reality. It may be fun and attractive to be in the streets, but soon it will catch up to you either now or later. School is what you make it. It will be tough sometimes, but you must sacrifice.

Participant 4 advised students:

African Americans must try. Don't let your skin tone be a barrier you're just as smart as the next guy. Don't let people be negative and try to persuade you from doing certain things, we must build. All you have to do is try.

Participant 5 advised students:

Education is power, so you must want this. You must investigate the background of the school and the profession that you want to pursue because it's hard enough for us Black men to get into college. I try to encourage other students through interaction. I say things like let's get it today when I see other students in the halls. Mainly I would tell young men to not give up.

Participant 6 advised students:

Don't fall into the partying, focus on your goals and everything will fall in line. Have a system or schedule so that you can adjust your study time and recreation time.

The advice that the participants gave are experienced based strategies that proved to be successful for them and may help others in their pursuit of a college degree.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this study identified the internal and external barriers that the participants faced while earning their college degrees. Each participant gave his account of which barrier he felt gave him the most concern and the strategy he used to overcome that barrier. The participants identified show that support systems such as school faculty and staff, and family were a benefit to the participants of the study that are involved with the academic success of the students beyond the classroom. A lack of achievement motivation and lack of a strong support system are issues that African American males face in their pursuit of a college degree. These issues must be overcome to help close the gap in graduation rates between African American males and other ethnic groups.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to answer these two research questions:

1. How did African American male college graduates overcome perceived barriers to education, so they can graduate from a multiple-race four-year resident college or university?
2. What are the perceived barriers to graduation faced by African American male graduates from a multiple-race four-year resident college or university?

The participants advised African American male students to stay focused, sacrifice, don't give up and try. The advice that the participants shared helped them to be successful in earning their college degree. Earning a college degree benefits not only the

individual but the families of the graduates and society. As stated in chapter 1, expanding college obtainment benefits society in terms of greater productivity, higher tax revenues, lowered reliance on social support programs, and a more informed and involved citizenry (Baum et al., 2013). The graduation rates for African American males has increased but there is still a gap in the graduation rates between African American males and other ethnic groups. This is an indication that there is further research that must be conducted to learn more about the African American males' perception to the barriers of higher education.

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## Appendix A: Research Databases

To conduct the research for the literature review I accessed the following databases:

1. Academic Search Complete
2. American Doctoral Dissertations,
3. Education Resource Information Center
3. Education Source,
4. Political Science Complete,
5. Primary Search,
6. Psyc Articles,
7. Psyc Books,
8. Psyc Critiques,
9. Research Starters Education.
10. SocIndex with Full Text

The following key phrases and words were used to search all databases:

1. Education and the African American male
2. College graduation and the African America male
3. Africa American and family dynamics
4. Race and education
5. Education and mentoring
6. Poverty and education
7. Self-Concept
8. Stereotype Threats

9. Force Field Analysis
10. African Americans and Institutional Racism
11. African Americans and structural racism
12. Racial identity
13. Critical Race Theory
14. Force Field Analysis

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

1. I am interested in hearing about the barriers, support, or your own strategies from your college career.
  - a. What was the biggest barrier for you in completing college?
  - b. What strategies did you use to overcome that barrier?
    - c. Please describe one specific time when you considered dropping out of college.
    - d. What influenced you to stay in college?
  - e. What would you recommend for other students like you?
2. Are you a first-generation college graduate?
  - a. How many other family members graduated from college?
  - b. How many family members are attending college?
  - c. How did this motivate you to complete college?
3. How did you fund your education?
  - a. What was that experience like?
4. What role did the people around you play in your completing college?
  - a. Classmates
  - b. Friends
  - c. Family
  - d. Yourself
    - e. How did that role help or hinder your college graduation? Potential Probe
  - f. Did you experience a difference between your peers and your friends?

5. What motivated you to complete college?

a. In what way did that motivate you?

6. What expectations for success or difficulty did you bring to college?

a. Where did you get that expectation?

Potential Probe

b. Who or what most prepared you for college?



### Appendix C: Participant Information

Survey Monkey web link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RYXDZ2L>