A Quantitative Examination Of Factors That Aid In The Persistence And Academic Success Of Black Male Initiative Participants

Timothy J Fair

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A quantitative examination of factors that aid in the persistence and academic success of
Black male initiative participants

By

Timothy J. Fair

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Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
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in Public Policy & Administration
in the Department of Political Science & Public Administration

Mississippi State, Mississippi

May 2017
A quantitative examination of factors that aid in the persistence and academic success of Black male initiative participants

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For Black men attending college, there are often a host of barriers inhibiting their success. In addition to academic challenges, some Black men report higher feelings of alienation, isolation and cultural incongruence than their White peers. For many, these challenges are so tempestuous that they often leave the academy without earning a degree. In efforts to increase the academic and social success of students, universities have implemented Black male initiatives to decrease the early withdrawal of men of color. The purpose of this study was to better understand the impact of Black male initiatives on the academic success and likelihood of persistence of self-identified Black men attending fourteen schools within the Southeastern Conference (SEC).

This study analyzed the survey responses of 124 online survey participants. Using various quantitative methods including multiple regression, the study found that the perceived likelihood of persistence is significantly correlated to BMI participation, perceptions of University Environment and Cultural Congruity. However, the results do not confirm a statistically significant relationship between any of the independent variables and academic success (as measured by GPA), as some studies have found.
Based on these findings, more research is required to investigate what factors help mediate the academic success of Black male initiative participants. It is also recommended that a qualitative analysis be conducted to gain a more robust look into the experiences of Black men participating in affinity-based organizations. Higher education administrators responsible for implementing BMI programs are advised to implement programs that emphasize not only social and cultural awareness but also academic support.
DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to the memories of my Great Grandparents, the late Samuel and Mary Spralls whose devotion to God, love for family, and concern for mankind helped to shape the man I am today.

I also dedicate this work to my parents and siblings who unknowingly served as my most salient motivation during this journey to the PhD.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to my nephew Braylen who I hope will one day look back at this work as proof that “anything is possible if you only believe.”
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the individuals who helped guide me through the long, yet transformative process towards the PhD.

First, I would like to thank God for the grace to finish this task. During the most difficult moments of this process, it was He who reminded me that “they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.” I am a testament to God’s unmerited favor and love.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to Dr. KC Morrison. Thank you for being more than a dissertation advisor, but a mentor and a source of strength and support. I appreciate you for forcing me to grapple with the study’s deeper questions, for being such an incisive reader, and insisting that I pay meticulous attention to my scholarly contribution. I will never forget your kindness or support.

I would also like to acknowledge other members of my committee for their indispensable assistance. Dr. Steven Shaffer provided invaluable statistical insight to me during the moments where a quantitative analysis seemed insurmountable. Dr. P. Edward French’s support and words of encouragement have assisted me during several difficult moments. Finally, I am thankful for Dr. Gerald Emison continued to remind me that “assertion without evidence is unconvincing.” I could not have asked for a more dedicated committee.

My graduate school experience was greatly enriched by the presence of wonderful people in my support network. Thanks to my cohort members, friends, church family,
fraternity brothers for their thoughtfulness, love, and support. Lastly, to the Black male college students who I have been blessed to work with during my time in the academy, this contribution is for you.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine the persistence and academic success of Black male collegians attending Predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Most research related to the experiences of Black males in higher education focuses on amplifying the voices of those who do not persist. This research seeks to explore the voices of Black males who are successfully persisting through the academy.

Since forced removal from the western coast of Africa, Blacks living in the United States have fought an uphill battle for the right to citizenship and the benefits thereof. For Blacks, many of the privileges afforded to the nation’s protected class were forbidden, including the right to an education. During a large part of the nation’s early history there were widespread injunctions levied against people of color seeking literacy (Williams, 2009). Literacy was determined to be unfit for Blacks because of the idea that it would awaken a desire for freedom and equality (Woodson, 1919). The illegality of literacy was preserved both by formal policy, which outlawed teaching the enslaved to read and write, and by systemic measures that banned them from gaining access to educational institutions.

Education was often treated as a benefit for those of high socio-economic status. This is evidenced by the admission standards of many early institutions, which only admitted White men of elite status. While a select group of men enjoyed the benefits of a
college education, women and enslaved persons were prohibited from enrollment, with little exception. Many of these institutions were founded by sectarian organizations seeking to educate students through their interpretation of Christian dogma. As Solomon (1985) notes, a college degree was a sign of prestige and of one’s potential for societal leadership.

Despite the largely accepted idea that Blacks were intellectually inferior, there were examples of individuals and institutions alike that focused on educating slaves. Though the general sentiment of the period was in favor of prohibiting literacy, there were some slave masters who taught their slaves to read (Franklin, 1976) while other slaves often learned to read from their masters’ children (Clift, 1966). In 1776, the Quakers formed the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, an order of congregants who worked to erect institutions for the enslaved while also advocating for the abolition of the institution of slavery (Clift, 1966). Free Blacks also worked to advocate for education and economic progress for their race. In 1790, the Brown Fellowship Society was founded in Charleston, South Carolina so that Free Blacks could work towards educating Black children and youth. For over 100 years, this organization used its shared capital to finance the construction of educational institutions (Harris, 1981). Meanwhile, in 1837, the Institute for Colored Youth was established in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This institute became the first organization that promoted higher learning for African Americans and was the first institution to be solely under the auspices and care of free Blacks (Knox, 1940).

As the demand for elementary and secondary education grew for Blacks, so did the desire to attend college. It was not until nearly 200 years after the first post-secondary
institution of higher education was founded that a Black man was awarded a baccalaureate degree (Slater, 1994). As Allen et al. (1991) posit, the period of 1870 through 1940 reflected the gradual admission of Black men and women into the academy. While there were earlier instances of admission for Black students, (for example, Dartmouth College offered enrollment to a Black man in 1824 (Slater, 1997), Thelin (2004) suggests it was not until the end of the Civil War that the pathway to education was broadened for Blacks. Before this period, only a fraction of African Americans students who could prove some facet of exceptionalism, were admitted to institutions of higher learning.

Blacks are now able to attend predominantly and historically White institutions (PWIs), where they often experience problems with retention. The problem is greatest among African American men. Harper (2012) found that nearly 70% of first year Black male students do not persist to graduation. He also noted that poor academic preparation, institutional fit and a lack of university resources were the cause for low retention amongst Black male students. While Astin (2006) suggests that the retention of Black male college students is stifled by their failure to be engaged within the institution.

Within the extant research on the retention of Black males, the discussion is often about how Black males underperform and do not experience academic success (Fries-Britt, 1998). McClure (2006) finds that a large portion of the studies on Black males in higher education focus on students who do not persist by enumerating their problems of retention and lack of degree attainment. Harper (2012) calls this body of literature a deficit approach to the study of Black males in college. He argues that the study of Black
male collegians should be done from an anti-deficit framework that focuses on Black male students who are academically successful.

Despite the growing amount of literature that amplifies the issues that certain Black males face at PWIs, some students persist. Many of them do so by utilizing race-specific student organizations to ensure their persistence and completion in these institutions where they have historically experienced racism. (Dancy, 2011; Harper & Quaye, 2007; McClure, 2006). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore one of these race specific programs to understand how Black males persist at predominantly White institutions: Black male leadership initiatives (BMIs). Because of the surplus of research studies that view Black males in higher education through a deficit-based lens, the study of successful men of color in college has often gone underdeveloped and neglected. This study enumerates the experience of Black male persisters.

In this chapter, I will begin with a brief history of Blacks in higher education. Then I will discuss the status of men in contemporary higher education, followed by the status of Black men at predominantly White institutions. Finally, I will conclude with the research questions that guide this study.

**History of Blacks in Higher Education**

After the Civil War, there was an immediate need and desire by Black Americans to gain formal access to citizenship, particularly the right to an education. In the 25 years following the Civil War, approximately 100 schools were founded with the intention of educating the formerly enslaved (Jewell, 2002). Following the passage of the 13th amendment, the Hatch Act of 1890, and the Supreme Court’s *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896, several more institutions of higher learning were founded with the sole purpose
of educating African Americans. These institutions have come to be known as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). HBCUs were founded for the purpose of racial uplift and to educate the descendants of the formerly enslaved (Gasman & Tudico, 2008). These schools have played an instrumental role since Black Americans were often unable to enjoy attending many of the institutions located throughout the nation, specifically in the South. HBCUs have been emblematic of the possibility of acquiring the American dream for African Americans (Gasman & Tudico, 2008).

Although HBCUs were a beacon of hope for African Americans attending those institutions, many were founded as a way to ensure that Whites were able to sustain schools that were segregated. This can be shown through an analysis of the policies that were passed during that period. Gasman and Hilton (2012) argue that the founding of HBCUs was an attempt to reassert the prevailing separate but equal doctrine of the period. For example, The Hatch act allowed states the autonomy to either provide separate schools for Blacks to attend or to admit them in the state’s existing colleges and universities. The *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision gave states constitutional justification to segregate schools by race on the assumption that the facilities would be “separate but equal” (Johnson, 1993). As a result, instead of admitting Blacks into its already existing institutions, states in the South decided to establish schools exclusively for Blacks. Although this policy further solidified a preexisting notion that African Americans were distinctly different than those in mainstream society, HBCUs were primarily responsible for creating a class of Black professionals. Still, segregating students on the basis of race proved to be unacceptable to Blacks. After the NAACP launched a legal attack on segregated public school education, the Supreme Court found it unconstitutional in the
landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). This case was the culmination of a long fought contention for educational equality for Black Americans—finding separate institutions to be inherently unequal (Fairclough, 2004). Johnson (1993) contends that the court decision “was in response to the deplorable conditions in which African Americans were educated and forced to live in conditions which were the result of legally sanctioned segregation” (p. 1409). Immediately following *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) there was a federal precedent set that called for desegregated educational systems and states were given the ability to execute the law under their own interpretation. Thus, many states continued for a long time to sponsor separate educational institutions for African Americans.

Because of the desire for educational, social and economic parity, many Blacks continued to advocate for equality amongst educational institutions and access to historically White institutions. However, as a consequence of the realities of discrimination and systematic racist practices, many colleges and universities in the South did not admit their first African American student until after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. During this period of aggressive civil rights advocacy, which worked to guarantee access and increased rights to minorities, more Black men and women began to enroll in PWIs. While the *Brown* decision was a monumental shift in the way the American system of education was executed, its effect was far more seen in primary and secondary institutions than in colleges and universities. It was not until the passage of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that states were required to admit African American students to PWIs (Thompson, 1998). Following the civil rights movement,
African Americans began to pursue and gain admission to many of the institutions from which they were once barred.

While in the last few decades, men and women of color have enrolled in colleges and universities at a far higher rate than ever before, low retention and persistence have become the most prevalent civil rights issue in higher education (Lang, 1992). Since the 1960s, minority enrollment at colleges and universities has continued to increase. Despite this surge in enrollment, racial disparities in retention are still prevalent at many PWIs (Bush & Bush, 2010; Harper, 2006). The retention rate for African American college students is five times lower than it is for Whites (McCauley, 1988).

Black students who prematurely withdraw from PWIs often dropout for reasons different than their White peers. For example, White students often dropout of college because they fail to declare a major (Carter, 2003); they have an inability to break away from past traditions or they fail to integrate academically (Tinto, 1993). While among Black students who withdraw, only 15% do so as a result of academic dismissal (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). Studies have also found that Black students at PWIs are often more likely to drop out early because they perceive their campuses as hostile (Love, 1993). Sewell & Shah (1967) contend that academic ability and socio-economic status affect the retention of students. Similarly, Tinto (1987) found that academic preparedness, not socioeconomic background is the largest contributing factor of retention disparities. While Steele (1992) posits even when academic preparedness was comparable for Black and White students, disparities still existed.
Status of Men in Contemporary Higher Education

Although the number of students seeking a post-secondary education is increasing for both women and men, women are now enrolling in college at a rate that is higher than their male peers (Bae et. al, 2000). While men once enrolled in colleges and universities at a far higher percentage than women, there has been a precipitous decline of male college enrollment. Looking back a few decades, one can witness an example of this reversal. In 1960, men received 65% of all baccalaureate degrees, while in 2004 women were graduating with 58% of college degrees (Buchmann & Diprete, 2006). This reversal is of concern for university administrators not simply because universities are now producing more women graduates than men but as Mortenson (2006) contends this reversal of the educational gender gap is indicative of an institutional failure to engage and connect with men.

Not only are women attending college more than their male counterparts, there is also a corresponding gender gap in their perceptions and attitudes about college. Research has begun to focus on perceptions related to education. Turley, Santos, & Ceja (2007) found that attitudes related to education, for men and women greatly differed by gender, where women are more likely to expect to attend and graduate from college than men. Scholars have typically found that men have lower expectations about receiving an education than women. Studies have found that this attitudinal gender gap causes women to pursue a post-secondary education at a greater percentage than their male counterparts (Pryor, Hurtado, Saenz, Santos & Korn, 2007).

Men are also less likely to participate in activities that are commonly associated with higher levels of achievement, success and retention. As an example of this, they are
less likely to spend time preparing for class by reading and writing than their female counterparts (Hu & Kuh, 2003). Male collegians are also less likely to seek the assistance of a tutor than females (Lett & Wright, 2003). As it relates to persistence and retention, men are less likely than women to persist to graduation.

Although women are over-performing men in many areas throughout the academy, the situation is not completely bleak for men. While women are enrolling in the academy at a greater percentage than males, men still constitute the majority in doctoral and professional degree programs. However, scholars have posited that this gap in enrollment could also reverse within the next few decades (Mortenson, 2003). When looking at student life outside of the classroom, men are more likely to be involved and represented in student leadership positions including student government than women (Astin, 1993). Men are also more likely to participate in various athletic programs during their undergraduate career; however, women outnumber men in study abroad or distance education programs (Goldstein & Kim, 2006). Given the status of men throughout the academy, there is an increased need for research that focuses on the experiences of men and how they successfully navigate through institutions of higher learning.

**Status of Black Male Collegians at Predominantly White Institutions**

As described above, men in college are less likely than women to succeed academically. However, for Black men in college, the problem of achieving academic success is more clearly defined. Black male collegians are among those least likely to persist, far outpacing Black females for example (Jackson & Moore, 2006). Throughout the higher education literature, this issue of Black male underperformance been explained in a variety of ways. One theory explains how Black males often underperform because
of the fear of “acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). In this theory, Blacks commonly view high-achieving African Americans as forsaking their individual cultural identity for the identity of the mainstream culture. Davis (2003) attempts to explain the disparity in academic success by theorizing that for many Black males, academic success is contrasted to their idea of masculinity. Hale (2001) posits racism as a contributor to the inability of Black males in college to succeed academically.

Several other studies enumerate the many problems facing African-American men who are seeking to attain a post-secondary degree. As is the case for all men, Black men have also experienced low college enrollment. Gay (2002) found that many of the issues facing Black male collegians can be linked to three root causes: the lack of preparation of Black students, barriers between Black students’ learning styles and the educator’s teaching styles and an educator’s lack of cultural sensitivity for African American students. However, other research has pointed to how academic preparedness has not shielded Black men in college from adverse experiences. For example, Niehart (2006) found that high-achieving Black male students also reported their experiences involving their peers, faculty and staff as arduous. Brown (2004) found that high-achieving Black males were often indeed ostracized for “acting White.” While Jackson (2003) contends that the acclimation to colleges and universities for Black males was commonly encumbered by issues of isolation, racism, alienation and having to adjust culturally.

The experiences of Black male collegians navigating through the White educational milieu are of stark concern to many individuals researching contemporary educational issues in America. Aside from contending with the perceptions of university officials that often view men of color as inadequate, Black males in college are often
perceived as a double-minority—in both their race and gender. Roach (2001) found that on many college campuses, Black women exceed Black male enrollment by nearly 50 percent. As Black men have continued to experience decreasing figures of enrollment and achievement, predominantly White institutions have also been less able to engage Black men in various on-campus leadership opportunities (Cuyjet, 1997).

Black males attending PWIs commonly view themselves as outsiders and struggle to find a niche on campus. More recent research has contended that Black men attending PWIs often perceive their campus climate as stressful and culturally insensitive (Brown, 2006). Other studies have found that Black males attending PWIs have often found it difficult to acclimate to their institution because of stereotypes, micro-aggressions and subtle racism (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). Strayhorn (2008) ascertained that Black male students at PWIs were often unlikely to interact with their peers from other ethnicities and this had a large bearing on their sense of belonging within the institution at-large. Smith, Allen and Danley (2007) found that Black males attending PWIs often characterize their universities as more hostile to Black male students than students of other ethnicities.

In addition to educational stakeholders, the federal government has also taken an interest in decreasing the educational disparities that commonly exist between Black males and other students. As part of one of the initiatives launched during his administration, President Barack Obama launched a program focused on mentorship programs and opportunities designed to address the disparities present between minority men and their peers. The My Brother’s Keeper initiative has focused on partnering with communities, faith-based groups and organizations to encourage participation from
community leaders and officials in assisting young men of color from their early childhood development to their enrollment to college (The White House, 2014). As a preventive measure, this initiative has sought to ensure throughout the nation's communities that men of color are given access to mentors, programs and organizations that would help them become positive contributors to society. In this initiative, the federal government has formally enumerated the problems faced by this group by allocating funds to be used to close the achievement gap and broaden access for men of color. The statistics on Black male achievement, both in and outside of the classroom make a clear case for a need for federal attention and increased scholarship by higher education administrators to focus on helping Black men gain success.

Ultimately, the successful matriculation of Black male collegians affects far more than the student—society and institutions alike bear the burden of having students enter into the academy and leaving without a degree. The institutional, cultural and personal expense of attrition is widespread (Bean & Metzner, 1985) and is a major factor why colleges and universities are expending so many resources to fixing its problem (Barnett, 2011). With many public institutions struggling to maintain programs given decreased state funding, it is important for institutions to maintain low attrition numbers. Tinto (1993) posits that far more than simply influencing the individual student, an institution’s survival is directly linked to its ability to retain students. One of the greatest revenue sources for an institution is the income it receives from student tuition and fees. Students who leave the university prematurely are also leaving with revenue that institutions rely upon to operate. Schneider (2011) contends that each year citizens are forced to assume a $9 billion debt for students who do not persist through graduation. Therefore, it is of
great economic utility for institutions and society alike to pay particular attention to the low retention percentages at many higher education institutions, specifically amongst historically underrepresented demographics. Given the challenges to the retention of Black male college students, it is necessary to conduct a study that explores how Black male leadership initiatives at PWIs contribute to their persistence.

**Problem Statement**

Given the context of the problems facing Black male collegians in the previous section, it is of great use to explore the experiences of successful Black male college students enrolled at PWIs. It is particularly urgent for administrators at PWIs to make a concerted effort to reach this group of students who are often the institution’s most underperforming group. There currently exists a limited amount of research relevant to the experiences of successful Black male college students at PWIs.

A growing number of institutions, specifically predominantly White institutions have attempted to answer the problem of low retention of its Black students by implementing Black male leadership initiatives. Many institutions of higher education have established Black male leadership initiatives to increase their outreach for Black male students through mentorship, cultural awareness and leadership-oriented curricula. In an educational climate tempered by decreasing public funds and budget cuts to various programs, retention initiatives located within institutions of higher learning are in need of research that will lead to increased knowledge on the effectiveness of these groups. While higher education administrators have worked to form support groups and leadership initiatives for historically underrepresented students, decreased public budgets have impacted their ability to thrive on college campuses. Aside from the decreased budget
that often obstructs the funding of such programs, there is also a declining of public support towards race-specific programs that may also inhibit the funding of such initiatives at mainline universities (Schuman, 1997). Because of the possible decline in support of such initiatives, further research is needed to discuss its utility.

There is a growing amount of higher education literature focused on the experiences of Black male students at PWIs that view their experience through a deficit lens. There exists only a sparse amount of research that examines the impact of Black male leadership initiatives on their persistence. Mitchell and Dell (1992) posit that additional analysis is needed to discover what influences American student engagement in campus organizations and activities. A study that examines the self-perceived impact of such groups adds valuable information on how to organize, structure and maintain culturally based student organizations at predominantly White institutions.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative study is threefold: to better understand the persistence of successful Black male collegians at PWIs; to understand the role in which Black male leadership initiatives have played in their persistence; and to make recommendations to higher education administrators on effective ways to structure BMLIs in efforts to increase the persistence of Black male students. To accomplish this purpose, this study will use a quantitative approach. A quantitative approach to research allows the researcher to examine relationships amongst variables while testing one’s hypotheses (Creswell, 2005). Using a robust survey instrument, the researcher is able to better gauge the perceptions of Black male college students, ultimately leading to an increased understanding of the tools needed to help other Black males persist.
The findings will expand the existing research on Black men in higher education; particularly those who attend PWIs by providing further knowledge on the perceived utility of Black male leadership initiatives as it relates to their persistence. This research also aims to provide higher education administrators and student affairs practitioners with further insight on some of the perceptions of Black men in higher education that may lead to the broader development of persistence, leadership and retention initiatives to better serve this segment of their student population.

**Significance of the Study**

Because of the surplus of research studies that view Black males in higher education through a deficit-based lens, the study of successful men of color in college has often gone underdeveloped and neglected. Attracting 86% of Black college students to their schools, PWIs are the entry point for most African Americans seeking a college degree (Watt, 2006). Thus, it is of great utility to study the experience of Black students attending such.

This study enumerates the experience of Black male persisters, not those who have failed to persist. Similar to Simmons’ (2013) study, which focuses on factors of persistence for Black men in a singular student organization at an institution, this research focuses on the role that Black male leadership initiatives play in assisting Black males in their persistence throughout higher education institutions. While Simmons’ research focuses on two African American men involved in a Black male leadership initiative at a predominantly White institution and the impact that this group had on those two Black male collegians, this current study differs because it focuses on multiple institutions, and also expands the number of individuals in the sample. Furthermore, this research
assesses the utility of such initiatives by viewing them as an impetus for retention and persistence. Finally, this study seeks to fill a gap in the extant literature on Black male leadership initiatives and Black male retention by providing higher education scholars, executive administrators and student affairs professionals with a more developed view on the impact of culturally-based leadership groups and assisting them with making more informed decisions on designing, implementing and managing culturally-based student organizations.

**Research Questions**

Research questions are integral to the clarity of any study. Enumerating its further utility, Maxwell (2012) suggested that a research questions function is “…to explain specifically what one’s study is intended to learn or understand. Research questions should also help guide the study and give one guidance on how to conduct it.” (p. 75). With this definition in mind, the following research questions will be used to guide the study:

1. How do perceptions of the university environment correlate to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?
2. How do perceptions of cultural congruity correlate to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?
3. How useful are Black male initiatives to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?
4. How does parental makeup & socio-economic status correlate to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?
Similar to any study, it is useful to provide a list of the definition of terms which are used throughout the study. These terms are defined in the section below.

**Definition of Terms**

*Attrition:* Refers to factors contributing to a student’s decision to depart from a post-secondary higher education institution. A student’s attrition can be either voluntary (for example, general apathy) or involuntary (dismissal from the institution, etc.).

*Black Male Leadership Initiative (BMLI):* Organizational student support groups typically found at predominantly White institutions. These organizations often focus on cultural awareness, leadership, personal and professional growth. Professional staff or faculty members facilitate many of these organizations.

*Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs):* Both public and private post-secondary institutions of higher learning that were founded with the mission to educate Black students.

*Predominantly White Institutions (PWI):* Both public and private post-secondary institutions of higher learning where Whites comprise a majority of the student population. In addition, most of these institutions have historically excluded non-Whites from attending prior to 1964.

*Persistence:* refers to a student continuing toward completing a baccalaureate degree. For this study, persistence refers to a student who is working towards their degree program without any interruption in their enrollment.
Retention: Refers to students who return to a university. Because of the high level of attrition between freshman and sophomore year, for the purposes of this study, retention refers to a student who has completed at least their first year of undergraduate study.

Limitations of the Study

Every research study will have its share of limitations. As Marshall and Rossman (2010) note, there is no such thing as a research study that is above reproach (p. 42) and that researchers must be upfront concerning their study’s limitations. This study focuses on using a quantitative approach that measures how Black male collegians persist through PWIs. As a researcher who has been involved in such a program, I acknowledge the potential for researcher bias. However, great care will be taken to minimize the researcher’s personal viewpoint from interfering with the research study. Using a quantitative instrument will allow participants the opportunity to report their experiences without the interference of the researcher will help reduce the researcher’s bias.

Because of the way in which a quantitative approach to research is analyzed, conducting a structured questionnaire limits the researcher’s ability to receive robust data that might be obtained in a qualitative study. However, the researcher will be able to identify factors that correlate to the academic success and persistence of a growing college student demographic. The research also depends exclusively on Black male collegians to be honest in their divulgence of self-reported information. Any deviance of complete probity from the respondents could impact the data received. In addition, the research method limits the researcher from gaining information from the subject that is outside the parameter of the questions being asked.
Summary

In this introductory section, I have discussed the history of Blacks in higher education, the current status of men in the academy and described the importance of studying the experiences of Black male collegians at PWIs. Based on the literature, Black men at PWIs have a lower persistence and graduation rate, and are less likely to participate in activities that lead to campus engagement.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

At its core, this research is concerned with amplifying the experiences of Black males and exploring the elements they perceive as an aid to their college persistence. The literature review provides an analysis of some of the factors that commonly lead to the academic success of Black male collegians. The integration, retention and academic success of Black males attending PWIs is a complex issue influenced by several variables. With this in mind, this chapter identifies two higher education theories as its theoretical basis: Tinto’s Student Integration Theory, and Guiffrida’s (2006) cultural departure framework. The chapter/analysis finds that an institution’s characteristics and cultural sensitivity can often be a factor in the persistence of its students. Secondly, this chapter reviews the salient literature surrounding the factors that influence Black male achievement. This literature review finds that the success of Black males in higher education is often influenced by their pre-collegiate education, cultural dissonance, familial support, academic support, collegiate student organization membership and Black male leadership initiatives.

"We have more work to do when more young Black men languish in prison than attend colleges and universities across America." (Obama, 2007).
During a campaign stop in 2007, Barack Obama made a statement addressing the state of Black men living in the Nation. His view was that those Black men in the Nation’s penal institutions outnumber those in college. His argument reflected a perception of Black men reinforced by stereotypes, the media, and false assumptions. While untrue, his statement is reflective of a widely held view of Black men—one in which they are perceived as at-risk. In alignment with this perception, scholars have often written about the experiences of Black males in education from a deficit-based paradigm. Throughout the literature, Black men are commonly referred to as a dying breed or an endangered species (Gordon, Gordon & Nemhhard, 1994; Mandara, 2006; Ogbu, 2008; Jackson & Moore, 2006). They are also commonly forced to contend with societal views and scholarship that paint their educational plight with broad generalizations—portraying them as a liability rather than an asset.

While there is a growing amount of scholarship devoted to the experiences of Black males attending institutions of higher learning, there is a limited amount of scholarship that focuses on those students who are successfully matriculating (McClure, 2006). In Harper’s (2012) study of successful Black male collegians, he identifies 219 Black male students who earned a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher. He found that all of the students were successfully integrated both academically and socially into their institutions. Similar to Harper’s study, higher education scholars who have studied high-achieving Black men have often done so from a narrow scope—by focusing on those students who earn a cumulative of 3.0 or higher without taking into consideration a range of the other factors I consider below which influence student persistence (Guiffrida, 2006; Harper, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007).
Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical perspectives provide the foundation for the inquiry into the persistence of members of Black male initiatives attending PWIs: Tinto’s Student Integration Theory (1975, 1987, 1993) and Guiffrida’s (2006) Cultural Departure Framework. Throughout the literature, credence is given to Vincent Tinto’s work, which amplifies how academic and social integration promote the persistence of college students. His research on student retention and persistence spans over four decades and is foundational to many of higher education’s current studies (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983). Before Tinto’s study, the persistence literature focused mainly on individual factors that contribute to a student’s decision to drop out. While these previous studies highlighted an aspect of a student’s decision to drop out, they failed to properly account for the institutional factors that often play a role in student attrition. Tinto’s work is viewed as paradigmatic because it introduces the notion that an institution’s characteristics, including its academic and social structures influence student persistence.

Tinto’s (1975) work on student integration and persistence centers on identifying factors in which students decide to withdraw from an institution before degree completion. He describes the phenomena of persistence as a “match between an individual’s motivation and academic ability and the institution’s academic and social characteristics.” His theory on integration, commonly referred to as the Student Integration Model has three tenets: (a) students enter an institution with a different levels of academic preparedness; (b) they acquire different levels of integration into the academic structure including grades and a commitment to their persistence; and (c) they acquire different levels of integration into the social structure of the institution including
how they develop relationships through formal and informal relationships. Tinto posited that the higher is a student’s academic and social integration, the greater is their propensity to persist.

Implicit in Tinto’s (1975) original model of persistence is the idea that students have various characteristics that help or hinder their persistence. According to his work, each student enters into the academy with three background characteristics: family background that includes variables like a family’s social status and a student’s parental education; individual attributes that include variables like race, gender, age and academic ability; and, pre-college education that include the level of rigor of one’s high school and pre-college GPA. These background characteristics influence both a student’s goal commitment and institutional commitment.

Tinto (1975) describes goal commitment as the extent to which a student is motivated to obtain a degree. While institutional commitment symbolizes the degree to which a student is motivated to graduate from a specific institution or school. Both a student’s goal and institutional commitment can evolve over time dependent on their integration into the academic and social systems of the institution. As a result, a student’s ability to integrate academically and socially can lead to a higher or lower level of goal and institutional commitment. Tinto (1987) finds that institutional commitment increases when one is more socially integrated into the institution. While a student with a goal commitment may be more inclined to withdraw from “x” institution, since they are committed to the goal of obtaining a degree, and not necessarily to a specific institution. He posits that universities that are committed to increasing retention and institutional commitment must also focus on student involvement both in and outside of the
classroom. They must also focus on facilitating opportunities for contact between their peers and faculty members.

Tinto’s (1975) work is largely influenced by Durkheim’s (1951) theory of suicide. In this theory, Durkheim suggests that suicide is the result of an individual’s inability to properly integrate into society. In essence, Durkheim’s study contends that individuals are less likely to commit suicide when they are surrounded with adequate support mechanisms. Similarly, Tinto finds that a student’s failure to persist to graduation is often based on an inability to integrate into the complexities of college life. Also closely related to Durkheim’s theory, Tinto finds that students who drop out of college often “represent a form of voluntary withdrawal from local communities that is as much a reflection on the community as it is of the individual who withdraws” (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto (1975) cited a failure to integrate into an institution’s academic and social systems as a significant contributor to a student’s decision to withdraw. He also found that a student’s extreme integration into one system without integrating into the other could contribute to a student’s decision to withdraw. For example, students who are extremely integrated into an institution’s social system may find themselves studying less and thereby less likely to do well academically. While, students who are extremely integrated into an institution’s academic system may find it more difficult to succeed outside the classroom—even given their success inside of its walls.

As a result of critique, Tinto revised his model (1985, 1993) to include four different experiences students face during their acclimation period—which might lead to their premature withdrawal: adjustment, difficulty, incongruence and isolation. Adjustment involves the transition from one’s family and home environment to their
institution. For some students, this adjustment period is so tumultuous that they withdraw prematurely. Because of their close relationships with family members, Black students might find it more difficult to adjust to an institution, especially when such an acclimation involves loosening ties with family members. The difficulty phase is described as a student’s ability to reach and maintain the academic standards of the institution. When students fail to meet these expectations, they are more likely to dropout. Given their experiences in K12 education, Black male college students may also find it difficult to meet the academic demands of a baccalaureate degree.

Incongruence occurs when there is a dissension between a student’s expectation of an institution and experienced reality. Research has found that Black college students often attend schools that do not meet their expectation (Gibbs, 1973; Smedley et. al, 1993). Finally, isolation occurs when a student has failed to create connections with members within the institution. Such failure can also lead to a student leaving an institution before earning a degree. Soloranzo et. al (2000) also suggest that Black students are more likely to report feeling isolated from their institution.

Because of increased critique on its applicability to students of color, Tinto’s (1993) revision of his model gives deference to the unique challenges minority students often face while attending PWIs. Given their common emphasis on preserving their institution’s historically dominant culture, PWIs often have a more difficult time assisting minority students to reach and obtain academic success. In his revised model, Tinto (1993) also found that students do not have to integrate into the university’s mainstream culture in order to experience academic success or persistence. While Tinto’s (1975, 1985) earlier models stressed the importance of academic and social integration into the
larger university context, he later concluded that students are also able to acquire a sense of community as members of an institution’s subcultures, which can aid in their ability to persist. Thus, it is of great import to study how Black male initiatives can serve as an institutional subculture for Black male collegians seeking to complete their baccalaureate degree.

While Tinto’s (1993) iteration of his model includes the experiences of Black collegians, scholars have argued that it falls short in fully explaining the nuanced experience of minority students. For example, Bourne-Bowie (2000) contend that many of the early studies, including Tinto’s model of integration have focused on a Eurocentric perspective—ignoring the unique experiences of African American students. Others have found that Tinto’s model fails to include cultural variables that would make the model pertinent to students of color (Hurtado, 1992). Because of the critiques to Tinto’s model regarding students of color, Guiffrida’s Cultural Advancement Theory also guides this study.

**Guiffrida’s Cultural Advancement Theory**

As a result of the near paradigmatic status of the Tinto (1975, 1985, 1993) models of persistence, there have been studies that have questioned its relevance on specific student demographics. Guiffrida’s (2006) study enumerated areas in which Tinto’s model is exclusionary to students of color. He found that there are cultural limitations to Tinto’s theory of student integration and departure, specifically related to how minority students acclimate into predominantly White institutions. Tinto’s (1975) model calls for students to completely integrate into their academic institution for successful persistence, Guiffrida (2006) contends that Tinto’s model ignores the potential damage that complete
integration could have on minority students. Instead, he suggests that the concept of bicultural integration helps minority students “succeed in college while being part of both minority and majority cultures” (p. 452).

The work of Guiffrida (2006) takes issue with arguments that students of color forsake their culture in efforts to gain membership in the institutional culture. A central tenet of the Tinto (1993) model is the notion that in order to successfully integrate into an institution students must first “break away” from past traditions and associations. Guiffrida (2006) contends that such a disassociation for minority students is unfair, or as Gonzalez (2000) argues, is cultural suicide—since minority students often come from cultures that are far different from the predominantly White institution they attend. Guiffrida (2006) posits that it is possible for Black students to thrive in historically White environments without forsaking their cultural norms. He also contends that the term integration be replaced with connection—so that students are encouraged to hold on to their familial ties while also engaging with the institutional culture.

Guiffrida’s (2006) model emphasized the cultural nuances, which often inhibit the successful integration and persistence of minority students. Guiffrida (2006) suggests that Black students are more collectivist-oriented than their White peers; that is, they tend to place greater value on group relationships and involvement. He adds that Black students are commonly forced to contend with finding ways to navigate higher education institutions while holding on to their collectivist-values; while also finding ways to fulfill institutional expectations of autonomy and competitiveness. Because of their cultural orientation towards collectivism, involvement in organizations, specifically ethnic-based groups appear to be highly correlated to the persistence of Black students (Guiffrida,
These on-campus groups provide a bridge between a student’s home environment and their institution, which encourages support and in turn increases their retention. Essential to their success, these groups provide outlets for students who might otherwise be experiencing feelings of alienation or cultural dissonance.

Ultimately, Guiffrida’s (2006) revision to the Tinto (1993) model on student persistence allowed for more cultural considerations for students at PWIs who are not members of the dominant group. In doing so, this work amplifies the relevance of Tinto’s work on diverse student populations. Guiffrida’s (2006) model clearly distinguishes between the experiences of White students and minority students attending majority institutions. He articulated a framework that recognizes the importance of familial ties for many students of color while also giving deference to the variances in cultural motivational orientations. Because of this argument, it is important for studies on persistence to focus on ways minority students can use their cultural identification to matriculate through the higher education milieu.

**Impact of Familial Support**

Black families living in America have faced many unique challenges. Although Black families are often characterized as nontraditional, their importance has been well articulated throughout the literature. Hill (1971) suggests that Black families persist through a high level of religiosity, fluid family roles and an emphasis on commitment to hard work as means for success. Billingsley & Caldwell (1991) build off of Hill’s work by finding Black families to be resilient despite the challenges they often endure. Hill (1971) also contends that for Black families, the idea of ambition and hard work are often emphasized—causing them to hold a deep commitment to success and upward mobility.
While Wilson & Tolson (1990) suggest that Black families are often more communal in their scope—with many including associates outside of their kinship.

Black families are also commonly characterized by their commitment to hard work and education (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1982). Because Black parents often play a significant role in the life of their children after they have reached adulthood, they are more likely to influence how Black collegians view academic success (Manns, 1997). The impact of familial support on academic success can be viewed long before Black men enroll into the academy. Parents often serve as a safety net for African American boys during their elementary and secondary education—preventing them from falling behind in their academic pursuit. Black children whose parents are more active in their academic life often report higher grades and achievement. David (2003) posits that coupled with consistent school attendance and a devotion to study time, parents of African American males help contribute to their success. Mandara (2006) suggests that when Black parents communicate regularly with their son’s teachers, take a vested interest in their studies and monitor their academic progress, they aid in their academic success.

Similar to the experiences of Black males in K12 education, Black men in the academy often rely heavily on the support of their families. In fact, familial support has been found to be integral to their persistence (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; Perna, 2000). Not only do Black families often encourage and highly esteem academic achievement (Ladner, 1998), Jones (2001) found that the families of Black male collegians often provide guidance and support while also helping to reaffirm their potential. Meanwhile, Hamrick & Stage (2004) found a correlation between parental
expectations and the college aspirations and academic success of Black students; and O’Leary et. al (1996) suggests that frequent communication with family members is essential for Black students attending PWIs.

**Impact of K-12 Education**

Studies focused on elementary and secondary education have found a long-existing achievement gap between Black male students and their peers (Fryer, 2004). For Black males, the hurdles to academic success often begin far before they enroll into institutions of higher learning (Noguera, 2008). While there is no consensus on when the achievement gap begins, Palmer et. al (2009) suggests that the underachievement of Black men typically begins in high school. This is shown in the significantly lower grades and test scores of Black male students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This disparity in achievement has far reaching effects even for those who do not enroll into the academy. Gandara et. al (1998) posit that minorities who underachieve in high school are typically less employable than those white students who do not graduate.

The pre-collegiate experiences of Black men often inhibit their academic success once they have gained admission into the academy. Black males are more likely to come from underperforming and less-funded schools and are often underprepared for the rigor that accompanies a baccalaureate degree pursuit (Ogbo, 2008). They are also more likely to attend an urban school—which has historically offered less-qualified and less-experienced teachers (Lewis, Simon et. al, 2010). During their time in elementary and secondary education, Black males are often treated inferior by their teachers and compeers (Davis, 2003). As a result, they often report lower self-confidence and feel ostracized from other students (Baggerly & Max, 2005). Scholars have also found that
Black men are more likely to be enrolled in remedial educational courses during their K-12 educational experience (Hall & Rowan, 2000). Additionally, research has found that the national average for high school graduation rates of Black men is the lowest out of all student demographic groups (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010).

A disparity can also be viewed in the way Black males are disciplined during their K-12 educational pursuit. Black males in K-12 education are more likely to be suspended or expelled than their peers. In their analysis of a large school district, Mendez & Knoff (2003) found that 50% of African American males in middle school were suspended during an academic year. Because of their increased propensity to face disciplinary action that often leads to their absence or removal from the classroom, these exclusionary discipline methods have been found to adversely affect Black boys (Skiba, 2000). Black males who are incessantly suspended, spend less time in the classroom and are more likely to underachieve in and out of the classroom (Skiba & Rausch, 2008).

Additionally, this disparity in disciplinary actions have a wide lasting impact on Black males. Darnesbourgh et al., (2010) suggest that the disproportionate amount of suspensions and expulsions that are given to Black males correlate to the amount of Black men that end up in the criminal justice system. As a consequence of the disparity of Black men in prison, a growing amount of Black men are not able to enjoy the full rights of citizenship. Alexander (2010) found that there are Black men disenfranchised today because of felonies than there were the year of the Fifteenth Amendment’s ratification. Some scholars have referred to this phenomena as the school-to-prison pipeline (Boyd, 2009).
Impact of Cultural Dissonance

Black men seeking to earn a degree at a PWI may also be met with the challenge of cultural dissonance—including an academic curriculum that is racially biased or having to communicate with professors who are culturally insensitive (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). For example, Strayhorn & DeVita (2010) found Black men often feel as if their professors treat them unjustly. Black males attending PWIs also report having a higher level of minority-status stress than their peers attending HBCUs (Wei et. al, 2010). Additionally, those Black males enrolled at PWIs are more likely to face stressors of “acting too Black” or “too white” in ways students at HBCUs do not have to face (Watkins et. al, 2007). Research has found that as a result of stereotype threat, minority students often perform lower than their peers and are less likely to reach their fullest potential (Aronson et. al, 2002). In a term he called “Stereotype Threat” Steele (1999) found that many Black students often live through the fear of confirming negative stereotypes about their culture. His research points out that Black students are often made to feel as though they represent their culture in every part of their educational experience.

Importance of academic support

Throughout the higher education literature, research shows a correlation between institutional support and the academic success of Black males. Many African American men find themselves enrolled in the academy unprepared to meet the rigorous demands of their institution. However, Black men who experience academic success at PWIs often do so by taking advantage of the various academic resources available. Some scholars have found that Black men often evade institutional academic support because they are
too proud to seek help (Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2010); or because they are
disengaged because of the fear of potentially acting White (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).
Other studies have found that Black men who experience academic success often do so
by taking advantage of their institution’s academic resources. For example, Black men
who take part in precollege programs such as summer bridge experiences or federal
TRIO programs are more likely to succeed than those students who do not (Strayhorn,
2008).

Aside from campus resources, faculty-student relationships often are a conduit for
student persistence. A relationship with a faculty member often aids in a student’s
propensity for success (Kuh and Hu, 2001). For Black males, a faculty-student
relationship helps them acclimate to their institution and supports them through feelings
of alienation. Stith & Russell (1994) found that high-achieving Black students often have
higher faculty interaction outside of their formal classroom time. The importance of this
relationship is even more pronounced when the faculty or staff member is also African
American. While there exists a shortage of Black faculty members at PWIs (Anderson,
et. al 1993), Black men have reported interactions with minority faculty as vital to their
academic success. For example, in a qualitative study of 28 Black male college students,
Wood & Turner (2011) found that faculty-student interaction played an integral role in
their persistence. Similarly, Comeaux (2008) found that Black male athletes are less
likely to have outside interaction with a faculty member, but when they do acquire such
relationships, they experience higher academic success and persistence rates.
Impact of Student Organizations

Throughout the literature, higher education scholars have sought to assess the influence of student organizations and peer support groups on the academic success of college students. The vast amount of research that examines this relationship has found student organization membership to be an impetus of retention for students in general, but specifically for students of color (Astin 1996; Tinto, 1987, 1993). Extant literature has found a positive relationship between peer interaction and college student success (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). Kuh (1993) surmised that academic peer support groups including the promotion of peer study partners can assist students in their ability to retain information and their chance of successful institutional integration. By maintaining peer networks, students are able to better-integrate in the overall culture of the university and have a greater chance at finding a niche that causes them to remain at the institution (Astin, 1993).

For Black collegians, the necessity for membership in peer support groups and student organizations is even more evident. Unlike their White peers, Black college students at PWIs often find it more difficult to socially integrate into their institution through informal means and rely on student organizations as a means of making connections (Tinto 1993). In Fischer’s (2007) quantitative study of campus involvement, she found that minority students who were involved in student organizations at PWIs were more likely to persist than non-involved students. Additionally, Museus’ (2008) qualitative study found that ethnic-based student organizations at universities helped Asian American and Black college students connect to their institution without having to fully assimilate to the dominant Eurocentric cultural norms.
Black students at PWIs often rely more on peer interaction to help them in their acclimation into the culture of the university and for support both academically and socially (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). These race-specific student organizations often function as a way to assist in the support of minority students. In DeSousa & King’s (1992) study of 162 students, they found that Black students were more likely to join student organizations in order to find support than their white student peers. However, they did not disaggregate their data by gender and it is unclear if their study has direct applicability to the study of Black male collegians specifically.

There is no general consensus in the literature concerning if race-specific student organizations are preferred by Black students or if they become part of minority-based student organizations because of feelings of alienation from the broader student demographic. For example, while Barol et. al (1983) concludes that Black students prefer to join Black student organizations and groups, Chevez (1992) contends that Black students attending PWIs have no preference concerning joining a race-specific student organization or becoming a member of a campus wide organization. Sutton & Terrell (1997) posit that Black males who participate in race-specific student organizations often use race-specific organizations as an entry point into the institution’s more mainstream groups. Meanwhile, Harper & Quaye (2007) suggest that both mainstream and ethnic-based student organizations provide an opportunity for Black male identity expression.

**Impact of Black Male Initiatives**

In an effort to increase the academic success and persistence of Black male students, several colleges and universities have implemented Black male initiatives.
These initiatives are often faculty or staff-led with an emphasis on student support and retention. Some of the common themes inherent in the framework of many initiatives are a focus on academic success, leadership, In the last few decades, these initiatives have grown in popularity and visibility at predominantly White institutions. BMIs are often structured around peer group mentoring—focusing on the academic and social integration of students who are historically the most susceptible to attrition (Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000).

While many initiatives have similar values and core missions, they are often uniquely structured and institutionally-specific. Harper & Kuykendall (2012) suggest that no single institutional initiative’s design will fix all of the issues surrounding the experiences of Black males in college, but rather; institutions should design programs that focus on the unique needs of their Black male student population. Additionally, many of the BMLIs at predominantly White institutions are designed with the assistance of campus administrators and faculty members—neglecting the input of students. Harper & Kuykendall (2012) contend that Black male students should be collaborators in the designing and implementation of the initiatives and not simply participants. Additionally, their study suggests that successful Black male leadership initiatives should be designed to focus more on leadership and student development than on social integration (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012).

Despite the variability of Black male initiative designs, there have been some which have been highlighted throughout the literature. In their study, Lavant et. al (1997) identified successful Black male initiatives across the Nation: The Black Man’s Think Tank located at the University of Cincinnati, The Student African American
Brotherhood founded at Georgia Southwestern University, Texas Southern University’s Black Male Initiative and The Meyerhoff Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. These groups give Black males at PWIs an opportunity for peer mentorship, leadership skills, cultural awareness and a chance for personal and professional growth. Additionally, Harper & Kuykendall (2012) identified The University of Arkansas at Little Rock, North Carolina Central University, Stanford University, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison as institutions with Black male initiatives that are meritorious.

While there is a limited amount of research devoted to the utility of Black male initiatives on the persistence of its participants, research has found a correlation between membership and academic success. The extant research on Black male leadership initiatives reveal several benefits to those who participate. Feintuch (2010) found that as a result of the Black male initiatives at The University of Ohio, the retention rate of Black male students rose from 80% to 89.3%. In his qualitative analysis of a Black male leadership program, Barker & Avery (2012) found that participants in their qualitative study attributed their opportunities for networking, institutional engagement and academic success to their BMLI membership. Lavant et al. (1997) found that Black male groups help Black male students better-integrate into the mainstream institutional community.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the literature surrounding the academic success of Black male collegians, by focusing on barriers and correlates to their persistence. Concepts of Student Integration Theory and Cultural Advancement Theory
were introduced to establish a theoretical framework for this study. The literature review outlined and presented many of the unique challenges that are endemic to the experiences of many Black male students. Additionally, this chapter focused on amplifying the channels that the literature has identified as helpful to the academic success of Black males within the academy. Lastly, the chapter identified the importance of Black male initiatives at predominately White institutions.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

While there is a measurable amount of literature that confirms a correlation between student involvement and academic performance; there is limited research available that focuses on how Black males use ethnic-based organizations to gain academic success. As previously addressed, the purpose of this study is to amplify the experiences of Black male students traversing through predominantly white institutions and to identify the factors that aid in their persistence. To better understand this, participants’ self-reported grade point averages and their perceived likelihood of persistence served as the dependent variables. The five independent variables included perceptions of university environment, perception of the Black male initiative’s usefulness, perceptions of cultural congruity, family structure and parental socioeconomic status. The following models and hypotheses were proposed to conduct this study:
Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: BMI participants who perceive their Black male initiative as more useful will report increased academic success, compared to participants who perceive their BMI as less useful.

Hypothesis Two: BMI participants who perceive their Black male initiative as more useful will report a higher likelihood to persist from their institution, compared to participants who perceive their BMI as less useful.
Hypothesis Three: BMI participants who perceive their university environment as more favorable will report increased academic success, compared to participants who perceive their university environment as less favorable.

Hypothesis Four: BMI participants who perceive their university environment as more favorable will report a higher likelihood to persist from their institution, compared to participants perceive their University environment as less favorable.

Hypothesis Five: BMI participants who report a higher institutional cultural congruity will report increased academic success, compared to participants who report a lower cultural congruence.

Hypothesis Six: BMI participants with a higher institutional cultural congruity will report a higher likelihood to persist from their institution, compared to participants who report a lower cultural congruence.

Hypothesis Seven: Black male initiative participants who come from two parent households will report increased academic success, compared to participants who not come from two parent households.

Hypothesis Eight: Black male initiative participants who come from two parent households will report a higher likelihood of persistence, compared to participants who do not come from two parent households.

Hypothesis Nine: Black male initiative participants whose parents have a higher socio economic status will report increased academic success, compared to participants whose parents do not have a higher socio economic status.
Hypothesis Ten: Black male initiative participants whose parents have a higher socio economic status will report a higher likelihood of persistence, compared to participants whose parents do not have a higher socio economic status.

Research Design

This quantitative study is constructed to define the extent to which academic success and persistence correlate to participation in Black male initiatives, perceptions of university environment, campus culture and variability in parental guardianship and socio-economic status.

To achieve this goal, several phases of research were conducted. The first phase of the methodology was to identify ten hypotheses to better clarify a research goal. Following the creation of hypotheses, indicators were identified for each of the five variables. The next phase included using bivariate statistical analysis, which were established to accompany each independent variable and index to assess the factors that correlate to the academic success of Black males participating in the study. Lastly, this study used multiple regression equations to identify the effect to which the multiple independent variables relate to the dependent variable of academic success.

Participants

The population for this research study consisted of participants who self-identified as a Black male. Further, only students who had spent at least a year in their university’s Black male initiative were allowed to participate. There were 14 schools throughout the southeast that were identified as sites for the study. These universities are often grouped
through their athletic affiliation and are known as the Southeastern Conference (SEC). These institutions include: the University of Alabama, the University of Arkansas, Auburn University, the University of Florida, the University of Georgia, the University of Kentucky, Louisiana State University, the University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, the University of South Carolina, the University of Tennessee, Texas A&M University and Vanderbilt University. There were 469 surveys disseminated to BMI participants. 124 surveys were completed yielding a 26% response rate.

**Instruments**

Because there is no single instrument available that measures how minority students perceive and experience affinity based groups, three instruments were used for this study. Namely, the University Environment Scale (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996), the Cultural Congruity Scale (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996) and a survey instrument constructed by the researcher that focuses on the experiences of Black men. The researcher’s survey instrument focused on exploring the experiences of Black male initiative participants and also on gaining demographic information useful to the study. The instruments were disseminated to participants using an online platform. The survey instruments are described in detail in the independent variables section of this chapter.

**Dependent Variables**

The dependent variable measured academic success of the study’s participants. Two questions were asked to participants to gauge their level of academic success: The first assessing the participant’s grade point average. The second question measured their perception of their likelihood for persistence.
Grade Point Average

Academic success, the first dependent variable, was measured by the participant’s self-reported grade point average. The following question was used to assess their level of academic success: “What is your GPA average?” Response options included “Under 1.99, 2.0 to 2.49, 2.50 to 2.99, 3.0 to 3.49, 3.5 to 3.99, and 4.0.” Those students who reported a grade point average under 1.99 were coded with the number one. Participants who reported a grade point average in the range of 2.0 to 2.49 were coded with the number two. Participants who reported a grade point average from 2.50 to 2.99 were coded with the number three. Participants who reported a grade point average from 3.0 to 3.49 were coded with the number four. Participants who reported a grade point average from 3.5 to 3.99 were coded with the number five and those who reported a 4.0 grade point average were coded with the number six.

Perceived likelihood of persistence

The second dependent variable was measured by focusing on the participant’s self-reported likelihood of persistence. The following question was used to measure this variable: “How likely are you to persist from your current university?” Possible responses included: “Very likely, likely, unlikely, and very unlikely.” Participants who chose very likely were coded with a number one; those who chose likely were coded with the number two. Participants who reported that they were unlikely to persist from their current institution were coded with the number three; and those who reported that they were very unlikely to persist from their current institution were coded with the number four. The scores from this scale were then subtracted from 5 so that the final scores ranged from 1 for very unlikely to 4 for very likely to persist.
Independent Variables

The study’s five independent variables were guided by themes, which derived from the literature on the academic success of Black males in the academy. Because of the structure of the two models, the independent variables were replicated in each model.

BMI Usefulness

The instrument for the first independent variable, Perceptions of the BMI’s usefulness was constructed by the researcher. The first 14 questions measured the demographic qualities of the participants in the study. The second 16 questions measured the participant’s perception of the correlation of Black male initiatives to their academic success. The first independent variable, Perceptions of the Black Male Initiative’s usefulness was measured by the questions, “How long have you been involved in your institution’s Black male initiative?” “My extracurricular involvement has increased since joining the Black Male initiative.” “The university’s Black male initiative gives me the support I need to stay in school.” “The university’s Black male initiative has provided me with a network and brotherhood that assists in my progression as a student.”

University Environment

The second independent variable, University Environment was assessed using the University Environment Scale (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). The University Environment Scale (UES) was constructed to explore the ways in which minority students perceive their campus climate. The original iteration of the scale included 16 items. After tests for internal consistency, two of the items were removed. The current University Environment Scale includes 14 items on a seven-point Likert-type scale. This
instrument gives participants the option of rating from (1) *Not at all* to (7) *very true*. To reduce the likelihood that respondents would give automatic answers, five of the items on the questionnaire are scored in reverse. A respondent’s final score ranges from 14 to 98, with a higher UES score indicating a more favorable impression of the institutional climate. Although the scale was originally constructed to measure the perceptions of Hispanic students, corresponding studies have established its validity for African American students (Gloria et al., 1999; Wei et al., 2011).

### Cultural Congruity

The third independent variable, cultural congruity was measured using the Cultural Congruity Scale (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). The Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS) was constructed to quantifiably measure whether minority students perceived their institution as accepting or opposed to their culture. It also measures the extent to which minority students feel that their culture meshes with the mainstream institutional culture. This scale includes 11 items on a seven-point Likert-type scale where a response of (1) *Not at all* to 7 (*A great deal*) A respondent’s final score ranges from 11 to 77. A higher CCS score denotes a more measurable perception of cultural congruity. In coding of the scale, eight of the statements must be coded in reverse. While the Cultural Congruity scale was also initially constructed to survey the perceptions of Hispanic students, it has also been validated as a measure for use amongst Black students (Constantine, Robinson, Wilton & Caldwell, 2002).
Family Structure

The fourth independent variable, family structure was used to assess how family dynamic correlates to a student’s academic success. Prior research suggests that the academic success of minority college students is linked to parental support (Phinney et al., 2005; Hodge & Mellin, 2010). As a result, the researcher used family dynamic as another independent variable related to academic success. Family dynamic was measured using the following question: “How would you describe your family structure?” Participants could choose from four options: Two biological parents; two parents (at least one parent is nonbiological), single parent, or other.

Parental Socioeconomic Status

The fifth independent variable, parental socioeconomic status, was measured to assess the correlation between a participant’s economic background and their likelihood to succeed academically. Socioeconomic status was used as an independent variable because there is a plethora of research available that links academic achievement to income (Sirin; Hill & Taylor, 2004). Parental socioeconomic status was measured using the following question, “What is your parent’s annual income before taxes?” Participants could choose from the following categories: “Below $25,000; $25,000-49,999; $50,000-74,999; $75,000-100,000; and above $100,000.”
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

To increase the retention of Black men attending predominantly White institutions, universities have created several innovative programs designed to help students finish school. As a byproduct, Black male initiatives have emerged at institutions throughout the Nation. This study examined Black men participating in Black male initiatives at universities throughout the Southeastern Conference (SEC). The purpose of this study was to identify to what degree are Black male initiatives useful to the academic success and persistence of its participants. To accomplish this goal, this study was guided by four research questions:

1. How do perceptions of the university environment correlate to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?
2. How do perceptions of cultural congruity correlate to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?
3. How useful are Black male initiatives to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?
4. How does parental makeup & socio-economic status correlate to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?

Dependent & Independent Variables

Through an analysis of the literature on college academic success, the researcher identified ten hypotheses to help clarify the research questions. The hypotheses for the study were examined individually using tests of correlation followed by two multiple
regression models. In the first model, ‘Academic Success’ as measured by self-reported grade point average, was regressed on variables related to the self-reported campus experience of the participants within the study. The second model assessed the students’ ‘Perceived Likelihood of Persistence’ regressed on the same variables related to the BMI participant’s campus experience. ‘Perceived Likelihood of Persistence’ was measured by the survey question, “How likely are you to graduate from your current institution.” The key independent variables addressed in the models included ‘Black Male Initiative (BMI) usefulness’; ‘University Environment’; ‘Cultural Congruity’; ‘Family Structure’; and ‘Parental Socioeconomic Status (SES)’.

BMI Usefulness’ was measured by a series of Likert scale questions including: The Black male initiative has helped strengthen my cultural knowledge; the Black male initiative has helped foster a brotherhood on campus for Black male students; the Black male initiative has positively contributed to my personal growth; the Black male initiative has helped me become more engaged within the institution; the Black male initiative gives me the support I need to stay in school; and I would recommend that other Black males on campus become part of our university’s Black male initiative. Responses to these questions ranged from (1) Not at all to (7) A great deal. The scale variable for BMI usefulness was created by computing the sum of responses to all six BMI related questions. The scores ranged from (6) being the lowest perceived Black male initiative score and (42) representing the highest perceived Black male initiative score.

‘University Environment’ was measured using the University Environment Scale as presented by Gloria and Kurpius (1996). The scale included a series of seven-point Likert Scale items with responses ranging from (1) Not at all to (7) A great deal. Two of
the original items were removed and five items were reversed scored. A summative scale variable was created to recode for reverse scoring. The total scores ranged from (14) least positive perception of university environment to (98), the highest positive perception of the university environment.

The Cultural Congruity Scale (Gloria and Kurpius, 1996, p. 539) was used to operationalize the variable ‘Cultural Congruity’. Similar to the University Environment Scale, a series of seven-point Likert scale items were used with eight of them being reverse coded. A new variable was computed to sum the responses to scale items with possible scores ranging from (11) low cultural congruity to (77) high cultural congruity.

‘Family structure’ was measured by the survey item: “Which of the following best describes your parent or parents living in your home while you were growing up?” A new dichotomous variable was created to differentiate between students who grow up in a two-parent home from those who grew up in different family dynamic.

A proxy of annual gross parent income measured ‘Parental SES’. The income levels included, (1) Below $25,000; (2) $25,000 - $49,999; (3) $49,999 - $74,999; (4) $74,999 - $100,000; and (5) Above $100,000.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Of the 124 study participants, 96.8% were full-time students. The majority of the students 120 (96.8%) self-identified as Black; 4 (3.2%) identified as other. Most of the respondents (45.2%) were in the 19-21-age range followed by 21-22 (21.8%), 17-19 (21.0%), and 23 or older (12.1%).
Table 1  Demographics and Frequencies of Total Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-19 years</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-21 years</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-22 years</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 or older</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>96.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideology</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BMI Membership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one year</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to under two years</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two to three years</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over three years</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GPA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 1.99</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0 to 2.49</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.50 to 2.99</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0 to 3.49</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 to 3.99</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$n=124$
Table 2  Demographics and Frequencies of Total Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Classification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>88.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment Status</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>96.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled Credits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or less</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-15</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 or more</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived likelihood of graduation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very likely</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>67.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very unlikely</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( n=124 \)

Among the respondents, the average reported grade point average was 2.69 and 67.8\% indicated that they are ‘very likely’ to graduate from their current institution. 46.2\% of respondents came from a two-parent household. The mean perceived usefulness of the Black male initiative was 34.09 and the mean cultural congruity scale score was 49.09. The majority of Black male students indicated annual parent gross incomes falling
between $25,000 - $49,999 (37.8%) and $49,999 - $74,999 (27.7%). Descriptive statistics are displayed in greater detail below in Table 3.

Table 3  Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Success</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI Usefulness</td>
<td>34.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Congruity</td>
<td>49.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Parent Household</td>
<td>55 (46.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Only</td>
<td>51 (42.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental SES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below $25,000</td>
<td>11 (9.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000 - $49,999</td>
<td>45 (37.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$49,999 - $74,999</td>
<td>33 (27.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$74,999 - $100,000</td>
<td>20 (16.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above $100,000</td>
<td>9 (7.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of Persistence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Likely</td>
<td>81 (68.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely</td>
<td>36 (30.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>2 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlations**

Of the ten proposed hypotheses, statistically significant correlations were found to support three hypotheses. Positive correlations were observed between perceived student likelihood to persist and perceived Black male initiative usefulness (r = .273); perceived university environment (r = .238); and cultural congruity (r = .255). These correlations reflect Pearson correlations calculated with excluded missing values. These results are indicated below on Table 4.
Table 4  Correlations between factors of self reported Black male initiative experience and Perceived Likelihood of Persistence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BMI usefulness</td>
<td>.272**</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Environment</td>
<td>.238**</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Congruity</td>
<td>.255**</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Structure</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental SES</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>.922</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **p < .01

Table 5  Correlations between factors of self-reported Black male initiative experience and Academic Success as measured by GPA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BMI usefulness</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>.416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Environment</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Congruity</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Structure</td>
<td>-.098</td>
<td>.290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental SES</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.503</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < .05

To give a more robust analysis of the data yielded from the study, a more thorough explanation of the components of each scale is provided in the following section.

Research Question One

Q1. How do perceptions of the university environment correlate to the academic success and persistence of Black male students? From this research question emerged two hypotheses:

H3. BMI participants who perceive their university environment as more favorable will report increased academic success, compared to participants who perceive their university environment as less favorable.
H3Ø. There is no statistically significant correlation between perceptions of university environment and the academic success of Black male students.

H4. BMI participants who perceive their university environment as more favorable will report a higher likelihood to persist from their institution, compared to participants perceive their University environment as less favorable.

H4Ø. There is no statistically significant correlation between perceptions of university environment and the persistence of Black male students.

To test the two hypotheses that emerged from research question one, the researcher used Pearson’s correlations to analyze if a relationship exists between the independent variables and the dependent variable.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation Academic Success</th>
<th>p value</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation Likelihood of Persistence</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class sizes are so large that I feel like a number</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.593</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The library staff is willing to help me find materials/books</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td><strong>.306</strong></td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University staff have been warm and friendly</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.581</td>
<td>.171</td>
<td>.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not feel valued as a student on campus</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>.320</td>
<td>-.060</td>
<td>.530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty have not been available to discuss my academic concerns</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.630</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid staff has been willing to help me with financial concerns</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.448</td>
<td><strong>.230</strong></td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The university encourages/sponsors ethnic groups on campus</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>.195</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>.168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are tutoring services available for me on campus</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.680</td>
<td><strong>.310</strong></td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The university seems to value minority students</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.819</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>.281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty has been available for help outside of class</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.843</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When examining the correlation between perceptions of university environment and academic success (H3), the data found that most of the University Environment Scale items were not statistically significant, with only two items yielding even a weak positively significant score. Statistically insignificant positive and weak associations were found amongst the items “The library staff is willing to help me find materials/books” ($r = .144$) and “The University encourages/sponsors ethnic groups on campus” ($r = .123$) with $p$ values over .05. Pearson’s correlation coefficient was also calculated to assess the correlation between perceptions of university environment and likelihood of persistence (H4). The results found that an institution’s library staff ($r = .306$, $p < .01$), financial aid staff ($r = .230$, $p < .05$) and tutoring services ($r = .310$, $p < .01$) serve as a predictor of one’s perception of persistence.

As determined by Pearson’s correlation, the hypothesis was accepted partially and the null hypothesis was rejected in part. Through this analysis, it has been found that
there is not enough evidence to support a relationship between perceptions of university environment and the academic success. However, there is evidence to support a statistically significant relationship between perceptions of university environment and the likelihood of persistence for Black men participating in BMIs at universities throughout the SEC.

**Research Question Two**

**Q2.** How do perceptions of cultural congruity correlate to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?

**H5.** BMI participants who report a higher institutional cultural congruity will report increased academic success, compared to participants who report a lower cultural congruence.

**H5∅.** There is no statistically significant correlation between perceptions of cultural congruity and the academic success of Black male students.

**H6.** BMI participants who report a higher institutional cultural congruity will report a higher likelihood to persist from their institution, compared to participants who report a lower cultural congruence.

**H6∅.** There is no statistically significant correlation between perceptions of cultural congruity and the perceptions of persistence of Black male students.

To test the two hypotheses that emerged from research question two, the researcher used Pearson’s correlations to analyze if a relationship exists between the independent variables and the dependent variable. These results are indicated below on Table 7.
Table 7  Correlations between Cultural Congruity Items, Academic Success as measured by GPA, and Perceived Likelihood of Persistence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation Academic Success</th>
<th>p value</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation Likelihood of Persistence</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I have to change myself to fit in at school</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.552</td>
<td>-.155</td>
<td>.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try not to show the parts of me that are “ethnically” based</td>
<td>-.061</td>
<td>.529</td>
<td>-.254**</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often feel like a chameleon, having to change myself depending on the ethnicity of the person I am with at school</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.701</td>
<td>-.087</td>
<td>.384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that my ethnicity is incompatible with other students</td>
<td>-.065</td>
<td>.501</td>
<td>-.175</td>
<td>.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can talk to my friends at school about my family and culture</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.860</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I am leaving my family values behind by going to college</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.548</td>
<td>-.160</td>
<td>.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My ethnic values are in conflict with what is expected at school</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.715</td>
<td>-.174</td>
<td>.069</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel that my language and/or appearance make it hard for me to fit in with other students</td>
<td>-.060</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family and school values often conflict</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel accepted at school as an ethnic minority</td>
<td>-.055</td>
<td>.461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As an ethnic minority, I feel as if I belong on this campus</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < .05
Note: **p < .01

When examining the correlation between perceptions of cultural congruity and academic success (H5), the data found that none of the Cultural Congruity Scale items were statistically significant, with many of the items for academic success indicating a weak negative relationship. For example: “I can talk to my friends at school about my family and culture” (r = -.017), “I feel accepted at school as an ethnic minority” (r = -.055) both yielded weak negative scores. The data failed to yield a statistically significant relationship that would confirm a correlation between perceptions of cultural congruity and academic success for BMI participants throughout the SEC. When examining the correlation between perceptions of cultural congruity and likelihood of persistence (H6), there were three items that showed statistically significant results. Within this set of results, statistically significant positive and weak correlations were found within the item “As an ethnic minority, I feel as if I belong on this campus”
Additionally, statistically significant negative items were “I try not to show the parts of me that are “ethnically” based” \( (r=-.254, < .01) \); “I feel that my language and/or appearance make it hard for me to fit in with other students” \( (r=-.279, **p < .01) \). These statistically significant but negative results are telling as they reveal that an inability to coalesce with the mainstream culture can negatively impact a student’s chance of persistence.

As determined by Pearson’s correlation, the hypothesis was accepted partially and the null hypothesis was rejected in part. This study has found that there is no evidence to support a relationship between perceptions of cultural congruity and academic success. Additionally, it found that there is evidence of a weak but statistically significant correlation between cultural congruity and the likelihood of persistence for Black men participating in BMIs at universities throughout the SEC.

**Research Question Three**

**Q3.** How useful are Black male initiatives to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?

**H1.** BMI participants who perceive their Black male initiative as more useful will report increased academic success, compared to participants who perceive their BMI as less useful.

**H10.** There is no statistically significant correlation between perceptions of BMI usefulness and the academic success of Black male students.

**H2.** BMI participants who perceive their Black male initiative as more useful will report a higher likelihood to persist from their institution, compared to participants who perceive their BMI as less useful.
There is no statistically significant correlation between perceptions of BMI usefulness and the likelihood of persistence of Black male students.

To test the two hypotheses that emerged from research question three, the researcher used Pearson’s correlations to analyze if a relationship exists between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Correlations for the BMI usefulness scale items can be found below in Table 8. The correlation between perceptions of BMI and academic success yielded overall low and statistically insignificant results. However, all scale items but one, “The Black male initiative has helped me become more engaged within the institution” had statistically significant correlations to perceived likelihood of persistence.
Table 8  Correlations between Black Male Initiative Items, Academic Success as measured by GPA, and Perceived Likelihood of Persistence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation Academic Success</th>
<th>p value</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation Likelihood of Persistence</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Black Male Initiative has helped strengthen my cultural knowledge.</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.255</td>
<td>.202*</td>
<td>.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Black male initiative has helped foster a brotherhood on campus for Black male students.</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.970</td>
<td>.312**</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Black male initiative has positively contributed to my personal growth.</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>.233</td>
<td>.268**</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Black male initiative has helped me become more engaged within the institution.</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.965</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Black male initiative gives me the support I need to stay in school.</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.735</td>
<td>.199*</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend that other Black males on campus become part of our university’s Black male initiative.</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td>.260**</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < .05
Note: **p < .01
As determined by Pearson’s correlation, the hypothesis was accepted partially and the null hypothesis was rejected in part. The study did not find a statistically significant positive relationship between perceptions of Black male initiatives and academic success; This study has found that there is evidence to support a relationship between perceptions of the Black male initiative and the likelihood of persistence for Black men participating in BMIs at universities throughout the SEC.

**Research Question Four**

**Q4.** How does parental makeup & socio-economic status correlate to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?

**H7.** Black male initiative participants who come from two parent households will report increased academic success, compared to participants who not come from two parent households.

**H7Ø.** There is no statistically significant correlation between parental makeup and the academic success of Black male students.

**H8: **Black male initiative participants who come from two parent households will report a higher likelihood of persistence, compared to participants who do not come from two parent households.

**H8Ø.** There is no statistically significant correlation between parental makeup and the perceptions of the likelihood of persistence for Black male students.

**H9.** Black male initiative participants whose parents have a higher socio economic status will report increased academic success, compared to participants whose parents do not have a higher socio economic status.
**H9∅.** There is no statistically significant correlation between parental SES and the academic success of Black male students.

**H10.** Black male initiative participants whose parents have a higher socio economic status will report a higher likelihood of persistence, compared to participants whose parents do not have a higher socio economic status.

**H10∅.** There is no statistically significant correlation between parental SES and perceptions of the likelihood of persistence for Black male students.

To test the four hypotheses that emerged from research question four, the researcher used Pearson’s correlations to analyze if a relationship exists between the independent variables and the dependent variables.

Table 9  Correlations between factors of self-reported Black male campus experience and Academic Success as measured by GPA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Structure</td>
<td>-.098</td>
<td>.290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental SES</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.503</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 reveals the results of Pearson’s correlation coefficient for the variables academic success, family structure, and parental SES. When examining the correlation between academic success and family structure, the data found that family structure yielded an insignificant negative relationship (r=-.098). For the second independent variables, the data found no statistically significant relationship between academic success and parental SES (r=.062).
Correlations between factors of self-reported Black male campus experience and Perceived Likelihood of Persistence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Structure</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental SES</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>.922</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < .05
Note: **p < .01

Table 10 enumerates the results of Pearson’s correlation coefficient for the variables perceived likelihood of persistence, family structure, and parental SES. When examining the correlation between perceived likelihood of persistence and the two independent variables, the data found no statistically significant relationship for family structure (r=-.017) or parental SES (r=-.009).

As determined by Pearson’s correlation, the hypotheses were rejected and the null hypotheses were accepted. This study has found that there is no evidence to support a relationship between family structure or parental SES on the academic success or persistence of Black men participating in BMIs at universities throughout the SEC.

**Multiple Regression**

The key factors related to the Black male campus experience were further explored using multiple regression. The first model which assessed ‘Academic Success’ was not significant (F = .575) indicating that it was not a good predictor of variances in Black male student academic success. Listwise data deletion occurred to remove cases with missing values. The model results are provided below in Table 11.
Table 11  Self-Reported Academic Success Regressed on Factors Related to Minority Male Campus Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>BMI Usefulness</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University Environment</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural Congruity</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>-.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Structure</td>
<td>-.320</td>
<td>.235</td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental SES</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td></td>
<td>.029</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12  Self-Reported Perceived Likelihood of Persistence Regressed on Factors Related to Minority Male Campus Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>BMI Usefulness</td>
<td>.023**</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University Environment</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural Congruity</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Structure</td>
<td>-.094</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>-.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental SES</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>-.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td></td>
<td>.192</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < .05  
Note: **p < .01

Table 12 reveals the results from the second multiple regression model assessing factors of the Black male campus experience as they relate to perceived likelihood of persistence. The model (F = 4.524) was significant (p < .01) indicating that it serves as a good predictor of student persistence. The R-square score (.192) suggests that the model accounts for 19.2% of variance in Black male student likelihood to persist. The Beta for
perceived usefulness of the Black male initiative was the only significant variable within the model.

**Factor Analysis**

The computed variable, BMI usefulness, was found to be a significant predictor of Black male students’ perceived likelihood of persistence. Table 13 displays the mean score and frequencies for high and low scores on each of the scale items. Low score includes combined response values (1) ‘Not at all’ and (2). High scores include combined responses for values (6) and (7) ‘A great deal’. In order to better understand the contribution of each individual survey item within the series of questions regarding the Black male initiative, a factor analysis was conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was greater than 0.5 (.898) indicating an acceptable value according to Kaiser (1974). The principal components extraction method was utilized indicating one key component accounted for 66.01% of variance.
Table 13  BMI Usefulness Mean and Frequencies scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Low Score N (%)</th>
<th>High Score N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Black Male Initiative has helped strengthen my cultural knowledge.</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>11 (9.2%)</td>
<td>54 (45.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Black male initiative has helped foster a brotherhood on campus for Black male students.</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>3 (2.5%)</td>
<td>71 (59.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Black male initiative has positively contributed to my personal growth.</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>3 (2.5%)</td>
<td>71 (59.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Black male initiative has helped me become more engaged within the institution.</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>2 (1.6%)</td>
<td>74 (62.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Black male initiative gives me the support I need to stay in school.</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>5 (4.2%)</td>
<td>69 (57.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend that other Black males on campus become part of our university’s Black male initiative.</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>5 (4.2%)</td>
<td>104 (87.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

The presented analyses examined dependent variables: perceived likelihood of persistence and academic success; with regard to their relationship to key factors including Black Male Initiative usefulness; university environment; cultural congruity;
family structure; and parental socioeconomic status. The statistically significant correlations between perceived likelihood of persistence and Black Male Initiative usefulness; university environment; and cultural congruity suggest that we can accept the following hypotheses:

Two - BMI participants who perceive their Black male initiative as more useful will report a higher likelihood to persist from their institution, compared to participants who perceive their BMI as less useful.;

Four - BMI participants who perceive their university environment as more favorable will report a higher likelihood to persist from their institution, compared to participants perceive their University environment as less favorable.;

And six - BMI participants with a higher institutional cultural congruity will report a higher likelihood to persist from their institution, compared to participants who report a lower cultural congruence.

The multiple regression models indicate that Black Male Initiative usefulness is the most strongly related variable perceived likelihood of persistence. Participation in the Black Male Initiative program seemingly has a large impact on students’ perceived sense of persistence at the university. Of the Black Male Initiative usefulness scale, the item I would recommend that other Black males on campus become part of our university’s Black male initiative had the highest mean score (6.38). The lowest mean score (5.13) represented the item: The Black Male Initiative has helped strengthen my cultural knowledge.

Each of the scales, university environment scale; cultural congruity scale; and Black Male Initiative scale, were found to be statistically significant in relationship to perceived likelihood of persistence and each had an acceptable Cronbach’s alpha score indicating reliability of each scale. The low contribution to variance in perceived
likelihood of persistence (19.2%) could be attributed to existing variables that were not examined.

None of the variables appear to be associated with academic success. The researcher posits that grade point average may not be the best measure of academic success for a study of this scale. Additionally, participants in the Black Male Initiative were primarily homogeneous with respect to parental socioeconomic status, with income falling primarily in the middle-class range, and were distributed about 50-50 with regard to family structure of single parent or two-parent households. The contribution of participation in the Black Male Initiative may have contributed most to social aspects of students’ experience on campus, thus most impacting perceived likelihood of persistence.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Introduction

The extant research available on academic success indicates a disparate experience for minority students traversing through the higher education milieu. There is no clearer example of this disparate experience than for those Black males seeking to earn a baccalaureate degree. All too often, a low level of persistence, retention and engagement precipitate the attrition of Black men in college. (Bush & Bush, 2010; Harper, 2006; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Davis, 2003; Hale 2001). This experience is often nuanced by racial incidents, subtle microaggressions and feelings of cultural incongruence (Solorzano et al., 2000). Despite the reality of the barriers that exist, many Black men in college obtain academic success.

This research focused on factors influencing the perceived academic success and persistence of Black male initiative participants at predominantly White schools. The study examined the degree to which membership in an ethnic based student organization influences the college student experience. Although there is a growing amount of literature focused on Black men in college, there remains a gap in exploring the influence of BMIs on student success. Because there is a need for quantitative research focusing on the experiences of students of color attending institutions of higher education (Wells & Stage, 2015), a quantitative approach was used in this study.
Tinto’s Student Integration Theory (1975, 1987, 1993) and Guiffrida’s (2006) Cultural Departure Framework informed this study. Tinto’s Student Integration Theory suggests that institutional characteristics are a significant part of a student’s decision to persist. Guiffrida’s framework advances Tinto’s theory by suggesting that there are cultural considerations that should be made when examining the persistence of students of color. Primarily, Guiffrida repudiates Tinto’s theory which suggests that students of color should cling to their families as a method of persistence, rather than forsake them during their academic journey.

This study sought to add to the growing amount of literature focusing on the experiences of Black men in higher education by exploring the following research questions:

1. How do perceptions of the university environment correlate to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?
2. How do perceptions of cultural congruity correlate to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?
3. How useful are Black male initiatives to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?
4. How does parental makeup & socio-economic status correlate to the academic success and persistence of Black male students?

This study is important to the academic success literature specifically as it relates to the study of men of color at predominantly White institutions. There has been no scholarship that has focused on how perceptions of a BMI’s usefulness, cultural congruity, and university environment mediate the academic success and persistence of Black men in the academy. Additionally, this study did not adopt a deficit-based approach to the study of men of color. Instead, it focused on how Black men are using
their student organization membership as a conduit of success. As the rate of students of color at institutions of higher learning continues to rise, so must the scholarship surrounding their academic success. Higher education administrators, faculty members and those who are charged with oversight of their institutional BMI can benefit from knowing how students perceive these groups. The findings of this study confirm its relevance and provide an interesting contribution to the persistence literature. This chapter enumerates the summary of findings, theoretical implications, limitations and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

BMI Usefulness

The data from this study indicated a significance of BMIs to program participants and its influence on their likelihood of persistence. The relationship between perceptions of BMI and perceptions of persistence was underscored by a strong relationship of significance at the < .01 level. An overwhelming majority of students who participated in the survey reported favorable views of their BMI and its effect on the student and campus experience. Additionally, a high number of the participants indicated that the BMI served as the support they needed to remain a student at their current institution. These two findings are important to the study of Black male initiatives, as it uncovers how students experience these organizations in a way the extant research had not found. This finding is consistent with Hypothesis 2: “BMI participants who perceive their Black male initiative as more useful will report a higher likelihood to persist from their institution, compared to participants who perceive their BMI as less useful.”
This finding is also consistent with the existing literature that focuses on Black male initiatives. This study was in alignment with Barker’s (2012) work, which finds that Black men participating in BMIs report a high level of engagement, a high level of access to institutional resources and increased networking opportunities. It also confirmed Brooms (2016) qualitative study, which found that Black men who participate in BMIs are more successful academically, reported increased access to resources, and a heightened sense of self and collective identities. Unlike Brooms’ work, this study was not able to identify a statistically significant correlation between BMI membership and increased academic success. However, students who took part in this study reported that membership in a BMI is a useful tool in their persistence. In an educational environment often marred by the low persistence of Black students, BMIs serve as a conduit for students to remain in the academy.

The high perceived likelihood of persistence for BMI participants within the study reveal an interesting finding. BMI membership is significant to their persistence and is statistically linked to their outlook of their future.

University Environment

Similar to the relationship between BMI membership and likelihood of persistence, there was a statistically significant relationship found between perceptions of university environment and likelihood of persistence. BMI participants, who reported a more favorable view of their university’s landscape, reported a higher likelihood of persistence. This is a valuable and important finding as universities continue to implement strategic planning efforts with hopes of becoming a more inclusive space. It is important to consider how Black men on college campuses perceive the campus
climate. In doing so, academic institutions could also be assisting students in their quest to persist to graduation.

This finding was confirmed by the extant literature focused on university climate. For example, Tinto (1975) found that students who are involved in support group organizations are more likely to hold favorable opinions of their university climate, which is a significant factor in their decision to persist. Additionally, Fleming (1990) found that organizations that provide academic and personal support to students contribute to increased positive perceptions of the university environment. Similarly Gloria et al.’s (1999) study found that college persistence was underscored by the participant’s organizational membership in support groups. This study differs from their work in that it focuses on gender specific organizations.

According to this study, Black men who perceive their university as supportive, inclusive and warm are more likely to believe they will persist. Rankin & Reason (2005) found that students of color experience their university environment in far different ways than their white peers. They found that students of color report a higher likelihood of perceiving their climate as hostile towards their culture than their majority and female compereers. A positive institutional environment is central to the persistence of students. This argument is amplified for students of color, who often report a higher level of incongruence with the mainstream institutional culture and are historically plagued by lower levels of retention and persistence.

**Cultural Congruity**

This study also found a statistically significant relationship between participant’s cultural congruity and their perceived likelihood of persistence. It confirmed an existing
relationship between BMI participant’s perception of their institutional cultural competence and their likelihood of persistence. This finding is valuable to the study of affinity-based organizations because it suggests that an institution’s cultural congruence helps mediate college success for students of color. It is also valuable to administrators and staff at institutions of higher learning. As institutional strategic planning is implemented, the findings of this study indicate a need for a college climate tempered by acceptance, inclusion and cultural competence.

This finding was also confirmed in the literature that focuses on cultural congruity. While cultural congruity has been validated as an important measure of student persistence for some time (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996), it was initially used as a metric for Latino students. It was not until later that it was found that cultural congruity was a statistically significant factor in African American students persistence decisions (Gloria et al., 1999). While this finding confirms the work of previous research, it also adds a unique contribution to the literature by using a sample of only African American male students.

This study found that perceptions of BMI usefulness, university environment and cultural congruity have a mediating effect on the perceived likelihood of persistence. While this study found a statistically significant relationship between BMI membership and likelihood of persistence; it cannot infer that students who participate in BMIs experience less racism and isolation than those minority students who do not participate. In fact, some participants who took part in the study reported that cultural insensitivity and racism underscored their undergraduate experience. However, this research suggests
that students are able to better handle the stressors of a culturally incongruent institution when they have access to student organizations, which provide support and assistance.

**Statistically insignificant findings**

Surprisingly, there was no statistically significant relationship found between any of the independent variables and the dependent variable academic success. This finding is significant because BMIs emerged as a way to ensure increased academic performance of Black men who were viewed as at-risk by institutions of higher learning. One of the core tenets for virtually all BMIs is a focus on the academic success of its participants. Given this emphasis on academics, the researcher hypothesized that there would be a correlation between BMI membership and academic success. To help understand these insignificant results, it may be helpful to explore how academic success is operationalized. While Parker et al. (2004) define academic success as academic achievement (GPA), there are other scholars who disagree with its use. For example, Jacobi (1991) defines academic success as degree completion; Pascarella & Terrenzini (1980) suggest that academic success is the acquiring of skills and competencies; and Heckert & Wallis (1998) operationalize academic success by the extent to which students find their education useful in their career field of choice. While this study measured academic success by using grade point average (GPA) as a metric, there are other ways academic success can be measured. If student participants conceptualize academic success more broadly, it may explain why higher grade point averages were not a salient component of their membership.
Most of the extant literature available on family structure and academic success, have found that students from two parent households are more likely to persist. As a result of these studies, single parent households have been pathologized throughout the literature (Biblarz & Raftery, 1999). Because of the abundance of literature on this subject, the researcher hypothesized that higher socioeconomic status and a two-parent household structure would increase the academic performance and persistence of BMI participants. Surprisingly, this study did not find a statistically significant relationship between socioeconomic status and family structure on the academic success or persistence of BMI participants. To better understand why a statistically significant relationship was not established between family structure and academic success or persistence, one must look more closely at the makeup of many Black families. As discussed earlier in this study, research has found that many Black families are often characterized by their nontraditional structure (Wilson & Tolson, 1990). In fact, Stack (1974) challenges the idea of a “traditional” family by arguing that is exclusionary to many Black families who are structured differently as a result of poverty and economic instability. These communal support networks may explain the non-significant relationship between family structure and academic success and likelihood of persistence.

The finding that parental SES was not predictive to the academic success or persistence of BMI participants was also surprising. The extant research on academic success finds a clear link between parental socioeconomic status and likelihood of persistence and academic achievement (Kraemer, 1997; Morales, 2012). Students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to come from underperforming high schools, have limited resources for co-curricular tutelage; and are
more likely to be first generation college students. Because of prior research, the researcher hypothesized that the data would yield a positive relationship between high socioeconomic status and academic achievement and persistence. One explanation that the hypothesis was rejected could be that the participants of the study comprise a relatively homogenous sample with respect to parental socioeconomic status. Most of the participants were from middle class family homes. Because of the consistent way participants self-reported their socioeconomic status, it may be more difficult to detect variance.

The findings of the study provide a limited support of Guiffrida’s (2003) research, which concludes Black students place a high regard for membership in ethnic based student organizations because of its ability to provide them with a network, an opportunity to work in the community and to interact with faculty members outside of the classroom. A key difference is the students participating in the study did not report that their membership in the BMI provided any increased opportunities to interface with faculty members. An explanation for this difference in results could be due to institutional size. Guiffrida’s (2003) work was focused on a midsized university. Conversely, all of the universities used in this study were large institutions. Research has found that students attending smaller universities are more likely to have increased faculty relations (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). As a result, it could be presumed that student organizations are more likely to enjoy increased faculty relationships at smaller institutions.
Theoretical Implications

This research aims to contribute to the persistence literature by offering insight on how minority men use affinity based student organizations to persist. While there is no dearth of research focusing on Black male success, much of the literature focuses on enumerating the problems without offering any contribution from those who find academic success. Throughout my dissertation, I argue that affinity based student organizations give Black men in college a sense of belongingness and collegiality that assist them in the goal of graduation. They provide for students a support network that encourages both academic and social integration.

The research on minority student college success consistently finds that minority students who reach academic success do so by becoming integrated academically and socially. While Tinto (1993) posits successful integration only happens when students break away from their cultural and familial ties, Guiffrida (2006) argues that for students of color, breaking away from their familial relationships ties is culturally incongruent. Guiffrida found that students of color typically thrive off of familial networks while they are in predominantly White environments. I extend Guiffrida’s (2006) cultural advancement theory by arguing that not only do BMIs support students through the social integration period, they also assist them in retention and persistence. They also support a sense of bicultural integration whereby students learn the art of succeeding while being part of both a majority and minority cultures (Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000).

Furthermore, I extend the cultural advancement framework by identifying a specific type of student organization that serves as a familial network to diverse students in college. By identifying other types of organizations for students, a case can be made
for the importance of maintaining ethnic student organizations on college campuses. In my model, I study how men experience their race and gender-specific organizations and to what degree that is impacted by certain pre-collegiate characteristics. In an educational climate tempered by the ethos of multiculturalism by assimilation, more research is needed that studies how race specific student organizations influence minority students during their college matriculation.

**Limitations**

Despite the researcher’s efforts, no study is completely infallible or without its share of limitations. Therefore, the final analysis of this study should be assessed in the context of potential limitations. The extent to which this study can be generalizable to comparable populations is a limitation. The participants of the study were self-identified Black men enrolled in schools within the Southeastern conference. Additionally, none of the Black male initiatives studied are identical in structural makeup. Future research should focus on identifying organizations at other BMI organizations to assess the extent to which this work can be supported or refuted.

Another limitation of this study is that it relied on self-reported data from participants. Because of which, the data could not be independently verified for its veracity. Therefore, there is a chance that participants could give an inaccurate answer, thereby skewing the final results of this study. Another limitation was the lack of prior research studies dealing with the study of Black male initiatives. While there was precedence in the literature for the study of these student organizations, there was no identifiable quantitative research study available to gain a foundation by which these groups should be studied. With a more robust amount of literature and scholarship...
devoted to this student demographic, a case can be made for their expansion. Finally, more empirical research can also potentially lead to identifying best practices that could lead to higher persistence, retention, and graduation rates for men of color.

**Recommended Research**

This research study examined the correlations to academic success and persistence for the African American male collegian. Through an analysis of the literature, a framework was identified which found that student success and persistence is often shaped by two kinds of factors: personal and institutional. For this study, personal factors were measured by assessing the student’s family makeup and parental socioeconomic status. Institutional factors were defined as cultural congruity, university environment and a student’s experience within the BMI. To expand this research, future studies may examine how racial identity is impacted by membership in a BMI. Most BMIs focus largely on cultural pride, brotherhood, and solidarity of its membership. A longitudinal study examining racial identity at the beginning of membership throughout a student’s time in college would enrich the literature on these organizations.

This study discovered that a student’s perception of their BMI’s usefulness is a significant predictor of their perceived likelihood of persistence. To better examine how students experience these organizations, a qualitative inquiry would yield a more robust analysis. A qualitative study would allow researchers to understand these experiences through the voice of the participants, while also learning various aspects of the organization that are not easily captured quantitatively. It would also be of great interest to study how BMI participants’ perceptions of cultural congruity and university
environment compare to their Black male peers who are not part of an institutional initiative.

**Summary**

The storied history of Black men in the academy is one filled with great complexity. Since their admission into predominantly White institutions, Black men have navigated through several barriers in their efforts to obtain a college degree. A college degree has been regularly considered the panacea for racial uplift of those American citizens located at the margins of society. Yet, there are many layers one must uncover to address the disparities in achievement and persistence that exist. This study has attempted to fill a gap in the literature by examining how Black men find an affinity based student organization to be a conduit of their success. As a result of this study, scholars are now able to continue to research and support BMIs with the addition of empirical research.

While there was no statistically significant relationship found between any of the independent variables and academic success, the social benefit of BMIs is not to be ignored. According to Tinto (1975) social integration is as much a pivotal piece for students entering the academy as academic integration. Harper & Kuykendall (2012) present eight strategic approaches for educators looking to expand the Black male student achievement gap. As part of this study, they found that many BMIs are more social in nature: “some campus initiatives focus almost entirely on providing entertainment and opportunities for social interaction among Black students. While they produce few academic outcomes, social support activities are undoubtedly critical on campuses at
which Black undergraduates are severely underrepresented. If properly structured, they can also improve students’ communications skills” (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012, p. 26).

Although the research questions and hypotheses were grounded in the existing literature, none of the variables related to academic success were statistically significant. As a result of this finding, other studies should be conducted to assess the correlation between variables that may affect the academic success of Black men participating in affinity based student organizations. As research surrounding these groups becomes more robust, institutional leaders, student affairs practitioners, and faculty will be better positioned to structure these groups for the maximum benefit of students. With the number of Black men attending PWIs expected to rise, it is important that institutions think strategically about assisting this student demographic in their quest for degree attainment.

It would be unfruitful to place complete blame on an institution for the inequitable outcomes of its students. Similarly, it would be unfair to expect Black male initiatives to be the sole support network for men of color once they gain admission. Institutions must implement a more holistic approach to the integration of its students. Multicultural offices, diversity centers and BMIs can only assist students as much as their limited scope and resources will allow. With the growing number of diverse students entering into the academy, there must be a regard for students’ various different learning styles, cultural barriers and institutional systems that might prevent students from learning at their optimum level. Institutions must take a more strategic approach to ensuring the success of all of their students, not simply their admission. The experiences of the men of color
who participated in this study reveal an interesting look into how Black men function in mainstream collegiate spaces.
REFERENCES


Woodson, C. G. (1919). The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861: A History of the Education of the Colored People of the United States from the Beginning of Slavery to the Civil War. Association for the Study of Negro Life and History
APPENDIX A

CONSENT LETTER
Online Survey Consent Form

You are invited to participate in an online survey on the experiences of Black male initiative participants. This is a research project being conducted by Timothy Fair, a Doctoral candidate at Mississippi State University. It should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

BENEFITS
You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your involvement in this study will help increase the knowledge gap related to Black male initiatives. Additionally, you will be able to reflect on your experiences within your student organization and its utility to your academic success.

RISKS
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Your survey answers will be sent to a link at Qualtrics where data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. Qualtrics does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study.

CONTACT
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact my research supervisor, Professor KC Morrison via phone at 662-325-2711 or via email at mkm301@msstate.edu.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT
Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. Clicking on the “Agree” button indicates that
- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older
- You self-identify as a Black man
- You have spent more than one year in your university’s Black male initiative
☐ Agree

☐ Disagree
APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT LETTER
Dear Colleague,

My name is Timothy Fair and I am Doctoral Candidate in the Public Policy & Administration program at Mississippi State University. I am currently doing a research study entitled *A quantitative examination of factors that aid in the persistence and academic success of Black male initiative participants*. The purpose of this study is to amplify the experiences of Black males at institutions of higher learning. Your assistance in facilitating recruitment of participants is greatly appreciated.

Participants should self-identify as being (a) Black male (b) having spent at least one year in a Black male initiative, and (c) a full time student at your institution of higher learning. Participants will be asked to take a short survey detailing their experiences in the organization. The total time commitment for participation is estimated at 15 minutes.

To help me gain more participants, I am asking that you please share the attached recruitment letter with your students. Additionally, if you are familiar with any other Black male initiative advisors throughout the SEC, I am asking that you share this letter with them. If you have any further questions, please contact me at tjf94@msstate.edu, or 414-803-4476.

Thank you,

Timothy Fair  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Public Policy & Administration  
Mississippi State University  
Tjf94@msstate.edu
Dear Student,

My name is Timothy Fair and I am a Doctoral candidate in the Department of Public Policy & Administration at Mississippi State University. I am researching African American male students who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs). I am specifically interested in learning how Black male collegians who take part in Black male initiatives reach academic success and gain strategies for retention.

The study consists of an online survey that will be administered to individual participants through Qualtrics (an online survey tool). You will be asked to provide answers to a series of prompts related to your experience within your Black male initiative and your university. Should you accept this invitation to participate, your answers will be kept confidential. Participation in this study will require about 15 minutes of your time.

I do not perceive any risks from your involvement within this study. Additionally, you will not receive any direct benefits from participating in the study. However, your involvement in this study will help increase the knowledge gap related to Black male initiatives. Additionally, you will be able to reflect on your experiences within your student organization and its utility to your academic success.

Your participation is voluntary and you are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw participation at any time.

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, please contact:

Timothy Fair
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Political Science & Administration
Mississippi State University
Tjf94@msstate.edu
APPENDIX C
SURVEY INSTRUMENT
Q2 What is your age range?
☐ 17-19
☐ 19-21
☐ 21-22
☐ 23 or older

Q3 What is your ethnicity/race? Please check all that apply
☐ Asian
☐ Black/African American
☐ Caucasian
☐ Hispanic/Latino
☐ Native American
☐ Pacific Islander/Hawaiian Native
☐ Other

Q13 What is your Mother’s highest level of completed education?
☐ Grade school
☐ High school or GED
☐ Vocational/technical school
☐ 2 year college degree
☐ 4-year college degree
☐ Master’s degree
☐ Professional degree (Ph.D., J.D., M.D.)

Q15 What is your Father’s highest level of completed education?
☐ Grade school
☐ High school or GED
☐ Vocational/technical school
☐ 2 year college degree
☐ 4-year college degree
☐ Master’s degree
☐ Professional degree (Ph.D., J.D., M.D.)

Q16 What is your parent’s annual income before taxes?
☐ Below $25,000
☐ $25,000–49,999
☐ $49,999–74,999
☐ $74,999–100,000
☐ Above $100,000

Q17 How do you identify politically?
☐ Liberal
☐ Conservative
☐ Moderate
Q18 How long have you been a member of your university’s Black male initiative?
- Less than one year
- One to under two years
- Two to three years
- Over three years

Q19 Which of the following best describes your parent or parents living in your home while you were growing up?
- Father and Mother
- Mother only
- Father only
- Grandparent
- Aunt/Uncle
- Older Sibling
- Foster Home
- Other

Q20 What is your current classification?
- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Q21 Which type of high school did you attend?
- Public
- Private
- Home school
- Other

Q22 What is your major?

Which of the following best describes your enrollment status?
- Full Time
- Part Time

Q23 Which of the following best describes your enrollment status?
- Full Time
- Part Time
Q24 What is your GPA Average?

- Under 1.99
- 2.0 to 2.49
- 2.50 to 2.99
- 3 to 3.49
- 3.5 to 3.99
- 4.0

Q25 How many credit hours are you taking this semester?

- 6 or less
- 7-11
- 12-15
- 16-19
- 20 or more

Q26 How likely are you to graduate from your current institution?

- Very Likely
- Likely
- Unlikely
- Very Unlikely
Q27. Black Male Initiative Usefulness Instrument

*Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree concerning your experience in the Black male initiative 1(Not at all) to 7(A great deal)*

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<tr>
<td>The Black Male Initiative has helped strengthen my cultural knowledge.</td>
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<td>The Black male initiative has helped foster a brotherhood on campus for Black male students.</td>
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<td>The Black male initiative has positively contributed to my personal growth.</td>
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<td>The Black male initiative has helped me become more engaged within the institution.</td>
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<td>The Black male initiative gives me the support I need to stay in school.</td>
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<td>I would recommend that other Black males on campus become part of our university's Black male initiative.</td>
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Q28 Cultural Congruity Scale

*Indicate the extent to which you have experienced the feeling or situation at school. 1 (Not at all) to 7 (A great deal)*

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<td>I feel that I have to change myself to fit in at school.</td>
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<td>I try not to show the parts of me that are “ethnically” based.</td>
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<td>I often feel like a chameleon, having to change myself depending on the ethnicity of the person I am with at school.</td>
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<td>I feel that my ethnicity is incompatible with other students.</td>
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<td>I can talk to my friends at school about my family and culture.</td>
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<td>I feel I am leaving my family values behind by going to college.</td>
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<td>My ethnic values are in conflict with what is expected at school</td>
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Q 29. University Environment Scale

Indicate the extent to which you have experienced the feeling or situation at school. 1 (Not at all) to 7 (A great deal).

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<td>Class sizes are so large that I feel like a</td>
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<td>The library staff is willing to help me find</td>
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<td>University staff have been warm and friendly</td>
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<td>I do not feel valued as a student on campus.</td>
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<td>Faculty have not been available to discuss my</td>
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<td>Financial aid staff has been willing to help</td>
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<td>The university encourages student groups on</td>
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<td>There are tutoring services available for me</td>
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<td>The university seems to value minority</td>
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<td>Faculty has been available for help outside</td>
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<td>Faculty has been available to help me make</td>
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<td>I feel as if no one cares about me</td>
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