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THE DREAM IS ALIVE: A STUDY OF SELECTED AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MALES' SUCCESS AT ROWAN UNIVERSITY

by  
Cory L. Boone

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
June 9, 2010

Thesis Chair: Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.

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## ABSTRACT

Cory L. Boone

THE DREAM IS ALIVE: A STUDY OF SELECTED AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES'  
SUCCESS AT ROWAN UNIVERSITY

2009/10

Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.

Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration

The purpose of this study was to better understand why African American males struggle to obtain a four-year college degree. A secondary purpose was to analyze the Black male college students' perceptions of success in college and the roles educational leaders played in their attendance and achievement in college. This study also looked at the behavior of the African American males in college. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. Selection criteria included male, African American undergraduate and graduate students attending Rowan University during the 2009/2010 academic year who were student leaders, and doing well in the classroom. Also, selected African American administrators at Rowan University were involved in the study.

The findings of the study generally confirmed that success of African American males in higher education is contingent on dealing with ongoing barriers in higher education. The participants believed they had a great experience at Rowan University because they had many resources that aided in their success in higher education.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for giving me the strength and opportunity in completing another mountain with many more to climb. He continues to bless me and I'm thankful for it.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

To be an American in the 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> century Black was considered to be a curse. The idea of African Americans obtaining an education and prospering to become influential leaders was preposterous. Nevertheless, through adversities and the determination of many historic black leaders, an education is color blind today. Black Americans are able to share the same dreams and opportunities as other racial and ethnic groups without the threat of discrimination. However, due to the current academic performance of African American males in colleges and universities, their ancestors' efforts may have been in vain.

#### Statement of the Problem

African American males face formidable challenges to their educational development in schools. Statistics on educational attainment suggest that many young African American males are at great risk in the nation's schools (King & Mitchell, 1990). Estimates of African American student high school dropout rates, for example, range from 48% nationwide to 54% in some urban areas (National Educational Association, 2005). In the 2001 – 2002 school year, African American males made up 8.6 % of national public school enrollments. However, they constituted 15% of those placed in special education, 20% of those classified as mentally retarded, 21% of those classified as emotionally disturbed, and 12% of those with a specific learning disability.

Twice as many African American males are in special education as compared to African American females, a fact that questions heredity and home environment as primary causes, and highlights school factors (Artiles & Trent, 1994). In addition, African American males have historically struggled in higher education, encountering subtle racism and various other forms of oppression (Hall & Rowan, 2001). The manifestations of racism are deeply rooted in the American psyche and are reflected in the practices and policies, however subtle, of higher education today (Hall & Rowan, 2001). As a result, African American males often face adversities in the higher education culture. African American males are disproportionately less represented in higher education institutions and job market, while having a higher rate of unemployment and suicide. Simultaneously, African American males are disproportionately less educated, suggesting a correlation to the various forms of racism and societal oppression (Austin, 1996). Researchers note there are many barriers contributing to the academic failures of African American males in higher education (Hall & Rowan, 2001).

#### Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to better understand why African American males struggle to obtain a four-year college degree. A secondary purpose was to analyze the Black male college students' perceptions of success in college educational environments and the roles educational leaders played in their attendance and achievement in college. This study also looked at the behavior of the African American males in college. Black males attending and succeeding in college today accept challenges and believe what Ralph Ellison (1952) stated in his famous book, *Invisible Man*: "My world has become one of infinite possibilities" (p.576). There has been an

increase of Black males' success in college and may help the trend of Black males failing in higher education but their voices are not heard. Therefore, these successful Black men attending college need to be heard.

### Significance of the Study

The study examined a complex topic that contains no direct answers. However, there are issues associated with this topic that must be addressed. African American males are a minority in every aspect in higher education. This study examined the pressure and success African American males endure in college. Are African American males receiving a fair opportunity while attending a four-year institution? What are some of the resources available for African American males to be successful at a college or university? Answers to these questions could help administrators of colleges and universities make their campuses more responsive to African American male students.

### Assumptions and Limitations

The sample size was limited to the African American males enrolled at Rowan University during the fall 2009/Spring 2010 semester. Several qualitative methodologies were conducted to explore the experiences of achieving African American males at Rowan University. A focus group and interviews were conducted amongst African American males at Rowan University. This entailed freshman, sophomores, juniors, seniors, graduate, doctoral students, as well as administrators. Potential bias may be present in the findings because this sample did not represent the whole population of African American males in colleges across the United States. A potential for researcher bias exists because this is a selected study being conducted at one institution, rather than

all institutions in the United States, but the researcher understands the sample population is limited to one institution as a means of controlling mixed institutional perspectives.

Also, my racial background identifies with this topic that can contribute to a researcher bias.

#### Operational Definitions

1. **Academic Success:** In this study, refers to an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits. The three clusters are, (a) above-average general abilities, (b) high levels of task commitment, and (c) high levels of creativity and the creativity and the capacity of the student to apply these traits to any potentially valuable area of human performance (Renzulli, 1984).
2. **Achievement Gap:** Refers to the observed disparity on a number of educational measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by gender, race/ethnicity, ability, and socioeconomic status. The achievement gap can be observed on a variety of measures, including standardized test scores, grade point average, dropout rates, and college-enrollment and -completion rates. In this study, achievement gap is observed among African American males, females and White Americans.
3. **African American Males:** In this study, individuals who are in the age bracket of 18-25; non-Hispanic; also, individuals involved in the higher education culture at Rowan University.
4. **Behavior:** In this study, the activity observed in an African American male.
5. **Demographics:** In this study, demographics are the statistical data of the African American males' culture at Rowan University.

6. Education: The act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life. In this study, education is the ability/inability of African American males to be motivated to attain a degree in higher education at Rowan University.
7. Institutional Discrimination: Refers to sex discrimination occurring routinely in family, political, economic, educational, military, and religious institutions. In this study, African American males have been properly misplaced in classroom settings.

### Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do selected African American males measure success in higher education?
2. What are the factors that inhibited African American males to be successful in college?
3. What are the factors that contributed to the persistence of successful African American males in higher education?

### Overview of the Study

Chapter II provides a review of literature pertinent to the study. This section includes a brief history of African American males in higher education, as well as the current issues they are associated within the higher education culture.

Chapter III addresses the study methodology and procedures. This includes data collection pertaining to the topic and data analysis.

Chapter IV presents the results of the study. This chapter addresses the research questions posed in chapter I. Narrative and statistical analysis are used to summarize the data in this section

Chapter V summarizes and discusses the major findings of the study, and offers with conclusions and recommendations for practice and further study.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Literature

#### Current Status of African American Males in Higher Education

The issues regarding African American males in higher education are evident. There are no direct answers to the current conditions of African American males in higher education. Statistics show that Black students' graduation rate is 43% nationwide. In essence, 57% of Black students who go to college drop out or leave college. There are 281,421,906 people in the United States of America as of 2007. In that total amount there are 34,658,190 identified as African American which makes up 12.32 % of the population in the country. Also African American males make up just 35% of all Blacks enrolled in higher education, and only 4.4% of the total college enrollment (Knapp, 2006). In addition, the ratio between African American males and females who are enrolled in college is 1 to 2. It is evident that the enrollment figures for African American male-to-female ratio is the most skewed of any racial group (Cuyjet, 2006). As a result, the overwhelming population of African American women in college puts a negative stereotype of African American men attending college (Cuyjet, 2006). African American males are the minority in every aspect on the college campus, which can impact their self-esteem in pursuing a degree. The issues relevant to the condition of African American men in American society are far reaching and complex (Cuyjet, 2006). Overall, the topic focusing on the condition of African American males receives little attention due to their low representation.

## Ethnic Identity of African American Males in Education

Exploring the process of black identity development in America is significant in deciphering how Black males view their blackness and how that view in turn impacts their leadership. Many experts today agree that race is a social construction. Biologically race is defined as “a-sub-group of peoples possessing a definite combination of physical characters, of genetic origin, the combination of which to varying degrees distinguishes the sub-group from other sub-groups of mankind” (Krogman, 1945, p.49). For several decades, scholars have involved themselves in an ongoing conversation about black identity and how it affects blacks in America. According to Demo and Hughes (1990), parental messages about what it means to be black are important in shaping racial identity.

Ethnic identity is a type of internal belief and has been shown to play an important role when focusing specifically on African Americans academic outcomes. The African American experience is rooted in social, cultural, and economic deprivation, lack of education and employment (Anderson, 1990). The African American experience focused on black-on-black crime, victimization, and dysfunctional family processes (Anderson, 1990). As a result, these social events adversely affect Blacks’ social development and self-esteem. Moreover, African Americans who managed to go to college often arrive unprepared to handle the demands of higher educational institutions (Cuyjet, 1997).

The arrival of African American students on Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) does not guarantee that they will successfully complete the requirements for a college degree because a significant proportion of college-bound African American males



suffer from the consequences of prior affiliations, associations, and interactions with adverse social-situational circumstances that have left burdening emotional scars (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). African American male students have difficulty adjusting to college because they experience the same kinds of problems they experienced before attending college. In a Predominant White Institution, African American males are assimilated into an unfamiliar environment composed of bureaucratic organizations and policies, entertainment organizations, sports programs, diverse populations with differences in cultural values, and a judicial system with legal agents working to maintain campus social order.

In addition, African Americans are associated with a negative stereotype in the education field. In America, Black men have been given labels such as those Gibbs (1988) refers to as the five D's: dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed. Although most African American men do not embody these stereotypes, persistent negative images continue to seriously affect the African-American male in terms of his own internalized sense of self. Therefore, teachers and administrators confuse their attitude as an inability to learn. As a result, African American males are placed in special classes that provide poor education and lack of direction from their future.

African American males develop an aggressive behavior from the environment in which they grew up (Hall & Rowan, 2001). This is a defense mechanism used to survive in the environment and earn respect from their peers. This is part of their ethnicity. Ethnic identity refers to an individual's involvement in an ethnic group and the cognitions and behaviors directly related to a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group (Phinney & Rotheram, 1987). African American males feel passionate about their

ethnicity (Hall & Rowan, 2001). Studies show (Cuyjet, 2006), that a positive relationship between ethnic identity and academic achievement for African American males can exist. Ethnic identity can serve as a buffer against factors that may decrease school engagement and academic efficacy. When African American males feel connected to their ethnic group and believe that their ethnic group values academic achievement, they have better academic outcomes.

Collectively, studies suggest (Hall & Rowan, 2001) that ethnic identity may play a positive, rather than negative role in African American adolescents' academic achievements and future education orientation, and may prevent failure to complete academic goals. Overall, it is rare for African American males to receive that support in the education system. In America, regardless of ethnicity and based on skin-color identification, black people are generally thought to be somewhat affected by the brutality and oppression that accompanied the slave trade and colonization, and the psychological effects of the residue of this system, resulting in the form of institutional racism (Helms, 1990). Also it has become a significant challenge to effectively understand and accurately portray African American males.

#### Achievement Gap Between African American Females and Males

Educators have argued that, since the 1950s, Black males have had little incentive to pursue higher education because of low employment opportunities regardless of educational advancement (Cross & Slater, 2000; Kunjufu, 1986; Ogbu, 1983). Black women typically benefit from corporate job market recruitment because of what some refer to as the "double minority" standard (*Journal of Black in Higher Education*, 1998). Therefore, African American women double the population of African American men in

college because African American males believe they will not receive a good job in corporate America. As a result, in their eyes, going to college is a waste of time and they explore other options.

Also, African American males are regarded as more problematic, stressful, and unpredictable than African American females (Connell, Halpem-Felher, Clifford, Crichlow, & Usinger, 1995; McAdoo, 1988). Studies have uncovered some teachers' belief that African American males are more aggressive and disruptive in class than females (McAdoo, 1988). Furthermore, the research of Gibbs (1992) suggests that the experiences of African American males are generally less favorable than that of African American females in their family, school, and community environment. As a result, African American males are perceived to have negative attitudes and poor character.

Teacher expectations and perceptions of African American students have been studied to determine the relation between teachers' expectations and perceptions and students' academic achievement (Davis & Jordan, 1994). Researchers have discovered that negative perceptions tend to be directed toward Black male students (Gillock & Reyes, 1996). As a result, African American males are deprived of receiving a fair education and counseling in the higher education system. African American females perform better academically and attend college in greater numbers than do African American males. As a result, this leads to a lack of Black male role models in home and schools. Also, in African American homes, black women tend to assume the responsibilities traditionally held by men. This situation has been noted as a major factor in the disparity between the interest of Black females and Black males in pursuing higher education (Cohen & Nee, 2000).

## Demographics of African American Males in Education

According to Kunjufu's (1986) argument, educators have not been trained to consider the psychological structure of the Black male culture; therefore, Black males are more likely to be discriminated against within the United States school culture. Many educators are unable to understand the personalities of their African American male students. Moreover, they are judged poorly in reference to education. Scholars note that African American parents, in particular, live in the inner cities where their children attend inner-city elementary, secondary, and high schools (Hall & Rowan, 2001). As a result, in the inner city, African American males tend to have an aggressive personality, which is valued in the community but not in the school culture. Since these behaviors are typically valued in the black community, but are seen as deviant behaviors in the school community, Black males are increasingly referred to special education programs. This misunderstanding negatively impacts their opportunities towards an equal education.

The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (2005) reported in 2000 that 3.9 million children enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools were classified as having mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or a specific learning disability. Researchers have shown that African American males are more likely than any other racial group to be referred to and placed in special education programs (Hale-Benson, 1986; Kunjufu, 1986). African American males are identified with a need of service in education; they are placed in a self-contained classroom.

African American males have the aggressive personality and behavior that educators are unfamiliar. As a result, the African American males are judged and thus isolated from the classroom. These self contained classrooms have been identified to contain inadequately

trained or unqualified teachers, poor curriculum, and lack of exposure to the general education population (Kunjufu, 1986).

Biggs (1993) argues that Blacks are more likely to be placed in self-contained classrooms than in less restrictive settings. Eight percent of African American males are in public institutions yet their representation in the nation's special education classes is nearly twice that, at 15% (Biggs, 1993). Even though some African American males benefit from special education, there are many African American males who are improperly placed. Also, students are enrolled in special education based on standardized test scores. Standardized test scores are believed to measure knowledge that students with a privileged background better understand (Biggs, 1993). These tests are administered to everyone. The African American community does not populate the majority of privileged neighborhoods. Many African American males report being discouraged about their chances for academic advancement because of poor academic outcomes and low teacher expectations (Kunjufu, 1986).

#### Impact of African American Male Student Athletes in Higher Education

Campus leaders are usually student affairs educators who are responsible for assessing campus climate; they must pay more attention to the social climate outside of the classroom to ensure that the quality of campus life has a positive impact on the successful recruitment, retention, and graduation of African American males (Cuyjet, 2006). The barriers African American males face in the campus environment must be addressed.

Person and Lenoir (1997) reported that "about one out of every nine African American male students at PWI four-year institutions is an athlete" (p. 96). As an athlete,

the African American male's challenges are doubled in the pursuit of a higher education degree. African American male athletes already must contend with a number of their own particular issues, one of which is a certain amount of isolation from the general campus environment, in order to devote hefty amounts of time to practices, travel, and competition for their sport, not to mention sufficient time to keep up with their studies (Cuyjet, 2006). A second issue is the reinforcement of persistent stereotypes, such as "Black male equals athlete" or "Black male equals dumb jock" (Hall, 2001). It is difficult to promote African American males as scholars and campus leaders when the majority of African American males are athletes.

It was also concluded that the Black athletes compensate for intellectual deficiencies by developing keen physical abilities (Hoberman, 1997). Issues involving students in higher education are as serious and complicated as the lack of improvement in African American male enrollment on college campus (Cuyjet, 2006). The campus climate, particularly outside of the classroom, is often referenced as one of the major reasons that these institutions have struggled to keep African American males on campus. African American males have to deal with many adversities while attempting to obtain a college degree. Student affairs educators must identify and address those barriers in the campus environment that impede these students' ability to have a positive college experience (Cuyjet, 2006). To make this goal a reality, faculty, staff, and administrators must understand and enhance diversity in the co-curriculum as it relates to all students, especially African American males (Cuyjet, 2006).

## Achievement Gap Between African American Males and White American Students

One dilemma that puzzles many educators, researchers, scholars, and politicians is the consistent achievement gap between Black and White students (Ferguson, 2001). The Brown versus Board of Education Supreme Court ruling allowed African American males equal opportunity for an education. Fifty years after the abolishment of segregated schools, research has shown that policies and practices that restrict equal access continue to exist, and are now referred to as "special education," "academic tracking," and "ability grouping" (Blanchet, 2006).

Black students typically perform at lower levels in vocabulary, reading and math than their White counterparts (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). The achievement gap has been studied for decades and several hypotheses have been developed to explain the reasons for this discrepancy, such as racism and motivational factors (Ogbu, 1983).

According to Fleming (1984), many African American males go to college expecting less prejudice and more social integration than they experience. At a Predominant White Institution, African American males found mistrust from whites. Often, black population is small at a PWI and African American males suffer from social isolation. Also, African American males are seen as a threat to "white male-dominated" corporate structure and this has contributed to the reduction of African American males pursuing higher education (Cross & Slater, 2000). The image of the African American man as a threatening figure had been so institutionalized in American culture that most African American men perceive themselves as being part of a permanently marginalized population (Schlossberg, 1989). African Americans come to the campus community at a psychological disadvantage in that they often perceive themselves a "less than" the others

they meet. African American students at PWI experience a high degree of isolation, alienation, and hostility (Allen, 1992; Love, 1993).

African American males' effort made by these students to feel accepted are sometimes compounded by the stresses they encounter based on personal doubts about their abilities and perceptions that faculty and other students may question their legitimacy as students (Sedlacek, 1999). African American males facing these experiences can be painful to an extent that no one can measure. The state of depression and not having anyone to talk to is an unfortunate event. Also the reality of being alone can drive someone to insanity. The fact that no one can relate to their emotions as a minority on college campus causes them to feel self-doubt. African American males harbor self doubt regarding their presence on campus, which often leads to a high degree of unwillingness to immerse themselves in campus life (Cuyjet, 2006). A review of the literature indicates that the achievement gap between Black and White students has had an impact on Black students' academic achievement and educational outcomes. White students are more prepared for the higher education because they are equipped with better tools. African American males are either misplaced in segregated classroom and receive fewer tools from their resources in educational institution.

The Dream is Alive

On the other hand, a plethora of research abounds that seeks to explain the educational failure of African American males rather than exploring their successes (Gayles, 2005). Spencer (2003) support this claim by stating that "The existing literature ignores the fact that many African American males are quite successful in spite of extreme reactive coping efforts required for life in high-risk environments" (p. 619).



There are African American young men who truly beat the odds (Harrington & Broadman, 1997). According to Harrington and Broadman, many African American males learn and succeed in school despite circumstances that include low socioeconomic status minimal teacher expectations, and inadequate representations of their successes. These young men overcome the barriers of economic disenfranchisement and social ostracism to flourish academically. They recognize the structural constraints in society, but they become determined not to allow these barriers to impede their social mobility (Conchas, 2006). Achieving the American dream is very real for them. Individual determination, hard work, effort, and support are key ingredients high achieving African American males believe will assist them in overcoming obstacles to become successful (Conchas, 2006). Not only do they survive their high school experiences, some excel academically to the point where they earn admission to the most selective colleges in the United States.

#### Success Factors

*In Black Men: Obsolete, Single, and Dangerous?* Madhubuti (1990), asserted that despite the literature that emphasizes the negative perceptions of Black men and depicts them as being in a state of crisis, there are great numbers of Black men who have withstood grave conditions to persist to success. Hall and Rowan (2001), concluded that it is not the African American male who is failing to persist in higher education, but it is higher education that is failing to provide a learning environment that is conducive to the needs of African American males. Therefore, campus environment, curriculum, faculty and administrators are all key success factors for African American males.

Cuyjet (2006), suggested participation in extracurricular activities could create a

positive social climate that can be important for the academic success of African American males and examined the advantages of developing communication and leadership skills. Therefore, African American males which are able to developed relationships with administrations and community leaders could promote academic success. For example, Black Greek letter organizations offered many opportunities for African American males students to become successful at the institution of higher learning.

Kimbrough (1995) submits that African American students who are involved in campus activities in general and Greek-letter organizations specifically, are more likely to experience higher degrees of leadership development and perceive the value of leadership skills more positively than are uninvolved and unaffiliated students. Hagedorn and Terenzini's (1996) study revealed that fraternity membership positively affects cognitive development among African American male collegians. Kimbrough and Sutton (2001) found that sororities and fraternities are among the most popular out-of-class engagement venues for contemporary African American undergraduates at PWI.

Black Greek Lettered Organizations tend to be the primary source of involvement for African American undergraduates. These organizations sponsor most of the culturally appealing social activities that members and non members alike come to and enjoy. Black Greek Lettered Organizations (BGLO) help aid the identity of African American men in College. Howard-Hamilton (1995), found that African American male undergraduates who were involved in campus organizations, especially Black fraternities, had higher levels of racial identity and a more positive sense of self-esteem than their high esteem counterparts.

Morgan-Gardner (2004) determined that “racial identity development was a salient factor in the social interaction process for Black students seeking out teachers, counselors, or advisors whose social ideology and culture related to their beliefs and values” (p. 124). McKusick and I.P. McPhail (2003) indicated that “the curriculum should be transformed to reflect the histories and perspectives of all people and should be adapted to make learning relevant to the lives of all learners through contextualization and application to everyday life” (p.18). Moreover, McPhail, I.P. and McPhail, C.J. (1999) further suggested that in order for learning facilitators to be successful in teaching the African American learner, they should create an empowerment culture for learners in the classroom and beyond by: (a) learning more about the culture of African American students, (b) listening to the voices of their learners, (c) weaving the realities of their learners’ lives into the curriculum, (d) including positive representations of the African American cultural heritage in the curriculum, and (e) revising, extending, and reformulating the theory of cultural mediation in instruction over time and with additional research. Review of these programs could help aid in the persistence of African American males in higher education.

Cuyjet (2006) concluded that initiatives aimed at encouraging more African American males to attend college and increasing their participation and retention, including mentoring initiatives and summer bridge programs, has proven successful in enhancing African American males college preparation, and reducing the high school attrition rate.

#### Frames of Leadership

Bolman and Deal (2003) viewed leadership through these frames (i.e., structural,

human resource, political, and symbolic) for an understanding of what leadership is and how it works. According to Bolman and Deal, each frame offers a distinctive view of major issues in change. The human resource frame focuses on needs and skills, the structural frame on alignment and clarity, the political frame on conflict and arenas, and the symbolic frame on loss of meaning and the importance of creating new symbols and ways. Each frame highlights a set of barriers and posits possibilities for making change stick.

The importance for Black males to reach their academic goals has resulted in need of educational leaders. According to Bolman and Deal (2003), the structural frame presented the design of an organization. Bolman and Deal stated, “Without a workable structure, people become unsure about what they are suppose to be doing” (p.322). For example, in a school where educational leaders are uncertain of their role, students may be unclear about their purposes for being in school, potentially causing underperformance in their scholastic activities with regard to their personal and school expectations. A clear understanding of roles and leaderships and adequate coordination are essential to any well performing school (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

In a school environment, the leader was responsive to his/her students’ needs and supportive of their personal goals by showing concern, listening to their aspirations, and communicating personal warmth and openness (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The needs of students must be met, and in order for them to perform at a high-quality level, they must feel respected and a part of the school. Therefore educators must understand that African American males are haunted by and must overcome the negative portrayals of who they are. Thus, educators must learn as much as possible about the community in which

the Black male lives and create a learning environment appealing to and inclusive of Black males.

### Spirituality of African American Males

For many African Americans, the meaning of religion is enhanced by recognizing the inherent relationship between religious faith and the sociocultural political nature of African American experiences in the United States (Nobles, 1998). Religion, in this sense is not primarily for the betterment of the community of which the individual is an integral part (Nobles, 1998). There is emerging recognition that spirituality is an important but overlooked aspect of student development (Chandler, Holder, & Kolander, 1992). To understand the importance of spirituality in college student development of African American males, one must trace the historical roots. African Americans were destined for mental and physical servitude when they arrived to America. Thus, Africans had a less than human status, lived in inhumane conditions, and were treated worse than animals (Derrickson, 1993). "It is no accident, then that after centuries of murders, atrocities, floggings, lynching, rebuke, discrimination, oppression, alienation, exploitation, degradation, and human devaluation, we are still alive nevertheless alive and kicking" (Stewart, 1997 p.133). How did we do it? How did we 'come over a way that with tears has been watered? Treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered'? How could we have come this far without losing our souls in the doldrums of human decadence and despair? To survive is one thing. To survive with dignity and hope with our souls and minds reasonably intact is quite another, and it is precisely our spirituality that has enabled us to survive, to maintain hopeful optimism on 'slender threads' to keep striving for excellence in all things notwithstanding our peril and plight (Stewart, 1997). African

American spirituality provided Black males with a means of living fearlessly and having a sense of unwavering personal strength in relation to one's enemies. Also, the church has been one of the primary places where African spirituality maintains its importance and survival. Majority of African American males college students used religion and spirituality as a pivotal part in their growth and development.

#### Family and Community Influence

The power of the males' family and community culture overwhelmingly contribute to their academic success even when considering their marginal performance on standardized tests and other traditional quantitative indicators of academic readiness (Kunjufu, 2001). Irvine (1990) reported that African American children whose parents verbalized their academic expectations of their children and supported these expectations with behaviors that reinforced these academic expectations contributed to academic achievement and positive educational outcomes. For gifted African American males, parental involvement in their son's education usually leads to higher levels of academic achievement (Fries-Britt, 1997).

Research has consistently found that family background and parental influence serve as primary forces in determining achievement over time (Irvine, 1990). Spencer (2003), summarize the value that African American parents contribute to their son's academic achievement, "Social resources such as caring parents and involvement in extracurricular activities help to facilitate positive [academic] outcomes" (p. 610).

African American young men welcomed discipline as a way of ordering their lives and as a clear signal of how significant adults wanted them to behave. Overall, Conchas (2006) states in his study that African American high achieving student cited three major sources

of their school engagement and motivation to succeed: (a) the importance of family and home life, (b) the significance of adult role models, and (c) the role of the school context.

#### Summary of the Literature Review

African American males must endure numerous obstacles to be successful in higher education. African American males face considerable uncertainty due to the ambiguous signals that emerge from the society. African American males are perceived to be threatening to society, and the American school culture of obedience places them in an unfair disadvantage.

The Brown versus Board of Education court verdict allowed everyone to have the opportunity to receive an equal education. However, due to their aggressive behavior and demographics, African American males are put in isolated classes; these classes often consist of low quality teachers who provide poor academic tools. African American males perceive hatred before lack of support.

In addition, African American males are often of a minority in higher institutions. For example, African American males are a minority in the general population: nine-to-one African American males are admitted to college for an athletic scholarship, and only one African American male is admitted for academic purposes. African American males who manage to exceed the performance level of peers become more aware of the discrimination and become less motivated to achieve in higher education.

Literature has displayed how race, schools and peers of Black males have contributed to their pitfalls and failures. However, the disastrous position that many African American males find themselves within the American educational system, there are success stories in this literature. African American males who have flourished have

done so because of a confluence of key attributes. For example, the idea of community, resilience of their peers and family propels this motivation to be successful. As a result, instead of continuing to research African American males failures, attention needs to be given to those Black males who are succeeding in higher education and concentrates what aid their success. Thus, additional research is required to better to understand and highlight the success of African American males in higher education.



## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

#### Context of the Study

The study was conducted at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ. Rowan University is divided into seven colleges: Business, Communication, Education, Engineering, Fine & Performing Arts, Liberal Arts & Sciences, Professional and Continuing Education, and a Graduate School. Rowan's nearly 11,000 students pursue degrees in 36 undergraduate majors, seven teacher certification programs, 26 master's degree programs, and a doctorate in educational leadership. As of 2009, among the 11,000 students at Rowan University, 368 students were Asian, 675 students Hispanic, 30 students Native American, 880 students Black American, and 7,933 students were White Americans (Rowan, 2009). The campus also includes Rowan Boulevard, the University townhouses, Science Hall, Education Hall and the Samuel H. Jones Innovation Center, the first building within the South Jersey Technology Park at Rowan University. Rowan University received a donation of \$100,000,000 in Henry and Betty Rowan in 1992 that helped transform the institution to a comprehensive public university.

#### Population and Sample Selection

The target population for this study was all African America male students who attend all New Jersey colleges and universities during fall 2009/spring 2010 school year.

The available population included all the African American male students of freshman, sophomores, juniors, seniors, graduate, as well as administrators at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ in the 2009/2010 academic year. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. Selection criteria included male, African American undergraduate and graduate students attending Rowan University during the 2009/2010 academic year who are student leaders, and doing well in the classroom. Also, selected African American administrators at Rowan University were involved in the study.

### Instrumentation

This study used qualitative research methodologies to explore the influences attitudes, beliefs, and values of successful African American young men and administrators who attended Rowan University. The primary focus of the research was to better understand the factors associated with success of selected African American men at Rowan University. Data were collected through an interview that covered two sessions (Appendix C & D) and a focus group (Appendix E) addressing success of African American males at Rowan University. Also, the session covered the outcome assessment in the classroom, and attitudes and involvement for African American males at Rowan. Each interview session (Appendix C & D) lasted 30 minutes and focus group was 60 minutes (Appendix E). The instruments used to assess African American males students' success at Rowan University were adapted from interview questions used in a previous study on sophomore attrition (Gohn, Swartz, & Donnelly, 2001) and questions and format taken from Baxter-Magola (1992). To determine content validity, the researcher had a student at Rowan University examine the questions for readability and general content. The researcher also had a faculty member at Rowan University in Educational

Leadership Department examine and give feedback about the instruments. This faculty member is an expert in higher education, research, and evaluation strategies. Following approval from the Institutional Review Board of Rowan University (Appendix A) interviews and focus group were conducted.

The major benefits of open-ended questions are to allow the participants to respond in any way they please. Qualitative data, such as open-ended interviews, and focus groups, allow for the actual words of people, offer many different perspectives on the study topic, and provide a complex picture of the situation (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

#### Data Collection Procedures

The focus group and interviews were conducted in the Campbell Library at Rowan University.

#### Focus Group

I introduced the purpose of the study to the participants and stressed the important contribution the participants were making in supporting this research project. The focus group met once, the session lasting for approximately 60 minutes and was audio taped. I initially "probed" open-ended questions so that the students could determine the direction of the interview (Seidman, 1998). The focus groups allowed me to observe the dynamics of how the students interacted with each other (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993). It also permitted the students to listen and share their unique experiences with one another in a safe and supportive environment.

## Interview

For the interview portion of the study, a total of 10 subjects were purposively selected (2-undergraduate freshman & sophomores; 2-juniors & seniors; 2 masters; 2 doctoral students; 2- administrators). Individual interviews were the primary source of data collection. I encouraged the participants to revisit any concepts and talk about them more in-depth during this phase of the study. Each interview was audio tape recorded and lasted approximately 30 minutes. Semi-structured, open-ended questions formed the basis of the protocol. Individual interviews provided narrative data that shed light on the personal and private insight of these young men as they reflected on their high school experiences (Merriam, 1998). Audiotapes were transcribed by a transcription service and from the transcriptions of these interviews, themes indicated what issues were important in these young men's lives. This information was vital in order to better understand what the feelings and opinions of academically successful young men were in order to provide insight related to thoughts of these achievers.

## Data Analysis

The independent variables in this study included gender and college institution. The dependent variables included the attitudes towards higher education and factors affecting higher education for African American men. The interviews and focus group were tape recorded, dated, transcribed, coded, and analyzed according to a three-stage process proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Data were also coded according to the

major themes that emerged and were appraised for issues that the young men addressed (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

The first stage of analysis consisted of open coding, whereby all transcribed interviews were read and analyzed line-by-line to generate initial categories. Open coding was achieved by looking closely at the names and categories that arose from the data. I broke down all aspects of the data so a comparison could be made regarding similarities and differences. Overall, data from the independent variables in the focus group were coded and transcribed by the researcher with the assistance of my thesis advisor, Dr. Sisco.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

Study findings are the result of participant interviews and focus group that were collected over a three month period in the spring 2010 semester. Each student and administrator was interviewed once a month for the three months. Also, some participants participated in the focus group during the last month of the three month period.

Interviews were completed to explore the influences, attitudes, beliefs, and values of successful African American young men and administrators who attended Rowan University. Also, the session covered the attitudes and involvement for African American males at Rowan.

#### Profile of the Sample

The eight individuals who participated in this study graciously gave their time, energy and soul to contribute to this study. The participants in the study were all African American male students that were freshman, sophomores, juniors, seniors, graduate, doctorate, as well as administrators at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ. Seven participants were interviewed and six of seven participants interviewed participated in the focus group as well. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. Selection criteria included male, African American undergraduate and graduate students attending Rowan University during the 2009/2010 academic year who are student leaders, and doing well in the classroom. Also, selected African American administrators at Rowan University were involved in the study.

The sample consisted of transfer, commuter, and residential students. Amongst the participants were one freshman, one sophomore, one junior, one senior, two graduate students and two administrators. All participants in the sample were involved in Greek Letter Organizations, Residential Learning, alternative admission program (Educational Opportunity Fund), Athletics, Student Orientation and organizations in Multicultural Affairs. All participants were between the ages of 19-40. Participants in the study are New Jersey natives and lived as far as 2 hours from Rowan University. Participants' G.P.A. ranged from a 2.5 to 3.7. Five of the participants identified themselves coming from the urban environment, while the other two participants came from suburban areas.

#### Data Analysis

Research Question 1: How do African American males measure success in higher education?

“How will/do you measure your success at Rowan University?”

Table 4.1 contains the results of the selected participants ideas of measuring success at Rowan University. Self-Fulfillment, Maturity, and Opportunity were the three main themes discussed. Participants identified Self-Fulfillment having the highest frequency and Opportunity having the lowest frequency. Participant 1 shared his viewpoint on this matter. “Success is being able to and wanting to wake up and go to work and school. Is having a level of satisfaction in what you do. Success is doing something you truly love.” Another participant stated, “I measure my success by my growth from freshman to senior year. I have grown from partying all time to wanting to grow and being successful in the books.”

Table 4.1

*Perceived Factors Measuring Success*

| Category         | Subcategory  | Frequency | Rank |
|------------------|--|-----------|------|
| Self Fulfillment | Satisfaction   | 7         | 1    |
|                  | Fulfilling your drive                                |           |      |
|                  | Do something you want to do<br>Completely your goals |           |      |
| Maturity         | Growing mentally                                     | 6         | 2    |
|                  | Transitioning  |           |      |
| Opportunity      | Meeting new people                                   | 5         | 3    |
|                  | Diversity  |           |      |
|                  | On campus involvement                                |           |      |

“Are you the same person when you first entered college?”

All participants agreed they are not the same when first entering college. When measuring success participants believed growth must be considered a factor. One of participants stated “no my horizon has broadened in college. I see I am working to my full potential, learning how to master my time management. I am a more mature person.” Another participant stated, “ no I’m more political sound, I understand the networking meeting new people, improved study skills, reading, organizing time management, and gaining more knowledge to succeed in life.”



Table 4.2

*Responses to Interview Question: Are you the same person when you first entered college?*

| Category       | Subcategory                       | Frequency | Rank |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|------|
| Knowledgeable  | Time management skills            | 5         | 1    |
|                | Broaden the horizons              |           |      |
|                | Improved study skills             |           |      |
|                | Improved reading skills           |           |      |
|                | Politically sound                 |           |      |
|                | Improved decision making          |           |      |
| Flexible       | Adapt to the environment          | 3         | 2    |
|                | Today is not the same as tomorrow |           |      |
|                | Success is about change           |           |      |
|                | In life goals change              |           |      |
| Responsibility | More obligations in life          | 1         | 3    |
|                | Mentally matured                  |           |      |

Research Question 2: What are the factors that inhibit African American males to be successful in college?

“What do you perceive, were obstacles to achieving academic success?”

Table 4.3 contains the results of the selected participants’ perception of obstacles achieving academic success at Rowan University. Stereotypes, Environment, Administration, Finance, and Classroom were the five main themes discussed. Participants identified Stereotypes having the highest frequency and Classroom having the lowest frequency. One participated stated, “often my peers may scrutinize me for acting intelligent; I even received remarks in college from people calling me white. It is demeaning not to have peers support your intelligence.” Another participant stated, “sometimes it the first impression you cannot shake, it about the stigmatism of African

American Males, it about the collegiate career, it your first impression being your last impression, how you label yourself.” Participant C stated, “financial issues were a big issue, coming from a third world country all money we make had to give back to the country.” Participant D stated, “the environment I grew up in was a jungle, I came from a poor household, and no one took care of us. Also, being a student in the urban high school, made me believe I had no academic support taking SAT, overall I did not notice I had no academic support until I came to college.” In addition, participants provided insight on other themes, which contained low frequencies on this topic. One participant stated, “my experience has been an eye- opening experience to explore these cultures, coming from a majority African American population, navigating through this system was tough.” Another participant stated, “being at a Predominately White Institution was weird, and realize you were the only African American in these classes.” On the other hand, another participant commented on faculty. “Coming to college I thought I did not need anyone I did not need help I made it on my own. In the classroom I was to myself because of my race. It was this semester and last semester I realized I do need help in the classroom, but the professor I met was unfair, interacting with the students was not a challenge compare to the professors.”

Table 4.3

*Perceived Obstacles to Achieving Academic Success*

| Category       | Subcategory  | Frequency | Rank |
|----------------|--|-----------|------|
| Stereotypes    | Being a nerd   | 8         | 1    |
|                | “Acting white”   |           |      |
|                | Speak differently  |           |      |
|                | Scrutinize for intelligence  |           |      |
|                | Perceptions on African American male, First impression our last impression |           |      |
| Environment    | Drugs, violence  | 5         | 2    |
|                | Poor household   |           |      |
|                | Death  |           |      |
|                | Urban high school  |           |      |
|                | Poor education<br>Diversity  |           |      |
| Administration | Showing favoritism   | 5         | 2    |
|                | Reaching out to certain students   |           |      |
|                | Lack of diversity in faculty/admin   |           |      |
| Finance        | College tuition  | 3         | 3    |
|                | Low SES  |           |      |
|                | Support family back home   |           |      |
| Classroom      | Only male student of color   | 3         | 3    |

“What do you perceived were your personal challenges to achieving academic success?”

Table 4.4 contains the results of the selected participants’ perception of personal challenges achieving academic success at Rowan University. Self Identity, Societal Factors, and Peer Pressure were the three main themes discussed. Participants identified Self Identity and Societal Factors having the highest frequency and Peer Pressure having the lowest frequency. Participant A stated, “I rather not follow, what slow me down is certain days I want off and days I do take off are detrimental to me.” Another participant

stated, "I feel I can be my biggest critic, it's me that responsible for my actions and outcomes."

"How had the media influenced your conceptions and ideas of masculinity?"

All participants believed the media does not influence them directly, but know it has a negative effect on black males. Participants shared their experience on this subject matter. As Participant B said, "media portray masculinity of someone being hard, being a thug, this can skew African Americans. Media shows to be a man you have to do something negative towards women, being tough, talking unintelligent. Media portrays African American being less educated." Another participant stated, "media just start portraying masculinity, but I recognize that many young men are heavily influenced by the genre and media what we have to do in combating the negative of being something you are not. Young black men thinks being true themselves is acting cool being all tough always being defensive. Masculinity needs a definition to discover their own masculinity to preserve life rather than taking it."

"Was there ever a conflict between achieving academically and being masculine?"

Five out of the seven participants experienced a conflict achieving academically and being masculine. One participant stated, "definitely people make me feel I'm not fitting in so you automatically ask what I can do. Then the masculinity comes up and you try to fit in. Either being a tough guy, drinking, whatever people feel is masculine at the time I would try to emulate." Another participant stated, "masculinity get in the way of their success, black males emulate a certain image being cool, being masculine there is a trade off. Their trade off is education. Dating, having a lot of female friends, listening to rap music wearing certain clothes, I assumed those behaviors, but recognize this is

not me.”

“Did you ever to hide your academic success?”

Three participants tried to hide their academic success. Participants shared their experience on this matter. One said, “Yes last semester I hide my success, tired of hearing people say I’m smart, I think I’m all that.” Another participant stated, “yes I did, I became less vocal about me being a student, did not want to be judged nor people make fun of me was not ready to present to everyone I am educated.”

Table 4.4

*Perceived Personal Challenges to Achieving Academic Success*

| Category         | Subcategory                      | Frequency | Rank |
|------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|------|
| Self Identity    | Ambitious                        | 7         | 1    |
|                  | I’m my biggest critic            |           |      |
|                  | I feel lazy at times             |           |      |
|                  | Poor approach with conflict      |           |      |
| Societal Factors | Media                            | 7         | 1    |
|                  | Media portray a false image      |           |      |
| Peer Pressure    | Hiding academic success          | 6         | 3    |
|                  | Did not want to be judged        |           |      |
|                  | Masculinity challenged by others |           |      |

Research Question 3: What are the factors that contribute to the persistence of successful African American males in higher education?

“What factors encouraged African American male’s persistence in higher education?”

Table 4.5 contains the results of the selected participants’ factors to encourage African American male’s persistence at Rowan University. Mentors, Extracurricular Activities, Family Support, Environment, and Religion were the five main themes discussed. Participants identified Mentors, Extracurricular Activities, and Family Support

having the highest frequency and Religion having the lowest frequency. Participant C stated, “having a mentor was most significant experience. He saw potential in me. He took time to make me better when no one else cared, responsible for me attending college.” Another participant stated, “playing football, football; kept me off the streets and gave me an opportunity to go to college.” Another participant stated, “education I knew I had to be involved in it. It was an expectation of my parents. Learn to enjoy education, which I think is missing from students of color. I had an early experience to feel a great deal of satisfaction of education. This was just an expectation from parents, so identification with education came young.” Finally, Participant E provided insight on religion by stating, “religion impacted me in a positive direction, parents instill in me religion, and church gave tools and ideals to the value of education.”

Table 4.5

*Factors, Which Encouraged African American Male’s Persistence in Higher Education*

| Category                   | Subcategory                            | Frequency | Rank |
|----------------------------|--|-----------|------|
| Mentors                    | Coach, Mother                          | 7         | 1    |
|                            | Guidance counselors, teachers          |           |      |
|                            | Professors, administrators             |           |      |
|                            | Instrumental to academic success       |           |      |
|                            | Showed they care for us                |           |      |
| Extracurricular Activities | Kept me off the streets                | 7         | 1    |
|                            | Help with development                  |           |      |
|                            | Leadership skills                      |           |      |
|                            | Networking                             |           |      |
|                            | Growth                                 |           |      |
|                            | Maturity                               |           |      |
| Family Support             | Tight knit family empowered education  | 7         | 1    |
|                            | Instill education was key to success   |           |      |
|                            | Expectation that had to be fulfilled   |           |      |
|                            | Family didn’t have a college education |           |      |

|             |  |   |   |
|-------------|--|---|---|
| Environment | Raised in poor environment propel me<br>Single parent home<br>Look for a better life<br>Peers did not want to be like<br>Seeing what other people did not have<br>Made me want to have success | 6 | 4 |
| Religion    | Gain support in church<br>Religion impact pursuit of an education<br>Parents instill religion<br>Provide tools and value of an education   | 4 | 5 |

“What factors personally help you succeed at Rowan University?”

Table 4.6 contains the results of the selected participants’ factors to encourage them to succeed at Rowan University. Personal Strength, Campus involvement, Campus resources, were the three main themes discussed. Participants identified Personal Strength, and Campus involvement having the highest frequency and Campus resources having the lowest frequency. Participant E stated, “my personal strength, desire and determination. I do not want to be content.”

“Tell me about all the things you do at the college. Do any of them help you?”

All participants are involved on campus and believe it contributed to their success. Participant B stated, “In college I work as a resident director, and that experience allows me the opportunity to gain a lot of knowledge. I work out with judicial affairs; learn to work with students and interact with them, participating in the mentoring program. Overall this helps me develop and kept me educationally motivated.” Another participant stated, “Transfer student when I came here, for me I had to a work study job at an on campus events. Immediate involvement help define me socially and gave me an opportunity to meet a lot of people, which lead to me being hired as evening operations

person in the student center. As a result, build a relationship with professional staff then became hall director, and then finally had a professional position because of my involvement in extracurricular activity.”

Table 4.6

*Perceived Factors that Help you Succeed at Rowan University*

| Category           | Subcategory                            | Frequency | Rank |
|--------------------|--|-----------|------|
| Personal Strength  | Motivation                             | 7         | 1    |
|                    | Determination                          |           |      |
|                    | Work ethic                             |           |      |
| Campus Involvement | Residential Learning                   | 7         | 1    |
|                    | Organizations in multicultural affairs |           |      |
|                    | Greek Life                             |           |      |
|                    | Mentoring program                      |           |      |
|                    | Alternate admission program EOF/MAP)   |           |      |
| Campus Resources   | Writing centers                        | 6         | 3    |
|                    | Mentoring program                      |           |      |
|                    | Tutoring centers                       |           |      |



## CHAPTER V

### Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Summary of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to better understand why African American males struggle to obtain a four-year college degree. A secondary purpose was to analyze the Black male college students' perceptions of success in college educational environments and the roles educational leaders played in their attendance and achievement in college. This study also looked at the behavior of the African American males in college. There has been an increase of Black males' success in college and which could help the trend of Black males failing in higher education. However, their voices are not heard. Therefore, these successful Black men attending college need to be heard.

Qualitative research methodologies were used to explore the influences attitudes, beliefs, and values of successful African American young men and administrators who attended Rowan University. Focus groups and interviews were to be taped, recorded, dated, transcribed, coded, and analyzed according to a three-stage process proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Data were also coded according to the major themes that emerged and were appraised for issues that the young men addressed (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

## Discussion of the Findings

The participants identified Self-Fulfillment, Maturity, and Opportunity as the three main themes significant to measuring their success. Participants believed success is finding happiness in the things you do. Success is doing something you truly love. The data suggest African American males recognize the structural constraints in society, but they became determined not to allow barriers to impede their social mobility (Conchas, 2006). Achieving the American dream is very real for them. Individual determination, hard work, effort, and support are key ingredients high achieving African American males believed assisted them in overcoming obstacles to become successful (Conchas, 2006).

The selected participants discussed factors that inhibited their academic success in higher education. Stereotypes, Environment, Administration, Finance, and Classroom were the five main themes discussed. Selected participants stated their peers with the same cultural background would scrutinize them for being intelligent in college. Also, they believed being an African American male comes with a label that cannot be peeled off. In other words due to the color of their skin they will be judged first, before learning about them. According to Kunjufu's (1986) argument, educators have not been trained to consider the psychological structure of the Black male culture; therefore, Black males are more likely to be discriminated against within the United States school culture. Many educators are unable to understand the personalities of their African American male students. Moreover, they are judged poorly in reference to education. Scholars note that African American parents, in particular, live in the inner cities where their children attend

inner-city elementary, secondary, and high schools (Hall & Rowan, 2001). As a result, in the inner city, African American males tend to have an aggressive personality, which is valued in the community but not in the school culture. Since these behaviors are typically valued in the black community, but are seen as deviant behaviors in the school community, Black males are increasingly referred to special education programs. Also, in the knowledge base it states the arrival of African American students on Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) does not guarantee that they will successfully complete the requirements for a college degree because a significant proportion of college-bound African American males suffer from the consequences of prior affiliations, associations, and interactions with adverse social-situational circumstances that have left burdening emotional scars (Hamilton-Howard, 1997). African American male students have difficulty adjusting to college because they experience the same kinds of problems they experienced before attending college. In a Predominant White Institution, African American males are assimilated into an unfamiliar environment composed of bureaucratic organizations and policies, entertainment organizations, sports programs, diverse populations with differences in cultural values, and a judicial system with legal agents working to maintain campus social order. African American males are seen as a threat to "white male-dominated" corporate structure and this has contributed to the reduction of African American males pursuing higher education (Cross & Slater, 2000). The image of the African American man as a threatening figure had been so institutionalized in American culture that most African American men perceive themselves as being part of a permanently marginalized population (Schlossberg, 1989). African Americans come to the campus community at a psychological disadvantage in

that they often perceive themselves a "less than" the others they meet. African American students at PWI experience a high degree of isolation, alienation, and hostility (Allen, 1992; Love, 1993).

This is a stigma for African American males in the collegiate level. The data suggest the African American experience is rooted in social, cultural, and economic deprivation, lack of education, and employment (Anderson, 1990). Also the data suggest African Americans are associated with a negative stereotype in the education field. In America, Black men have been given labels such as those Gibbs (1988) refers to as the five Ds: dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed. Although most African American men do not embody these stereotypes, persistent negative images continue to seriously affect the African-American male in terms of his own internalized sense of self. Therefore, teachers and administrators confuse their attitude as an inability to learn. For example, according to the knowledge base, teacher expectations and perceptions of African American students have been studied to determine the relation between teachers' expectations and perceptions and students' academic achievement (Davis & Jordan, 1994). Researchers have discovered that negative perceptions tend to be directed toward Black male students (Gillock & Reyes, 1996). As a result, African American males are deprived of receiving a fair education and counseling in the higher education system.

In addition, the environment was another common theme discussed that can inhibit their ability to succeed in the level of higher education. A majority of the participants came from an environment full of violence, drugs, poverty and large African American community. These participants began college at a disadvantage because their environment had poor teachers and lack of resources to succeed at the next level in

college. The data suggest the African American community does not populate the majority of privileged neighborhoods. Participant D stated, "the environment I grew up in was a jungle, I came from a poor household, no one took care of us. Also, being a student in the urban high school, made me believe I had no academic support taking SAT, overall I did not notice I had no academic support until I came to college." Many African American males report being discouraged about their chances for academic advancement because of poor academic outcomes and low teacher expectations (Kunjufu, 1986). Fifty years after the abolishment of segregated schools, research has shown that policies and practices that restrict equal access continue to exist, and are now referred to as "special education," "academic tracking," and "ability grouping" (Blanchet, 2006).

Also, the participants discussed personal factors that influenced their barriers in higher education. Self Identity, Societal Factors, and Peer Pressure were three main themes discussed. Participants believed they are their biggest critic. They believed the only person to slow them down is themselves. This ego arises from an environment, where they feel no one can relate to them. Data suggest that since no one can relate to their emotions as a minority on college campus this causes them to feel self-doubt. African American males harbor self doubt regarding their presence on campus, which often leads to a high degree of unwillingness to immerse themselves in campus life (Cuyjet, 2006).

Societal Factors was another factor discussed that influenced their barriers in higher education. The tension between masculinity and achieving academically was a constant struggle for the African American community. Based on the media and the actions of the society African American men are often portrayed as aggressive non-

educated. Also, African American men that are considered cool are thugs, or athletes and have the ability to speak unintelligently. In the knowledge base, Person and Lenoir (1997) reported that "about one out of every nine African American male students at PWI four-year institutions is an athlete" (p. 96). This has provided another opportunity to reinforce the negative stereotype that Black male equals athlete" or "Black male equals dumb jock" (Hall, 2001). It is difficult to promote African American males as scholars and campus leaders when the majority of African American males are athletes.

It was also concluded that the Black athletes compensate for intellectual deficiencies by developing keen physical abilities (Hoberman, 1997). Participants believed that society portrayed African American male to be less educated. Data suggest in America, regardless of ethnicity and based on skin-color identification, black people are generally thought to be somewhat affected by the brutality and oppression that accompanied the slave trade and colonization, and the psychological effects of the residue of this system, resulting in a form of institutional racism (Helms, 1990). Also it has become a significant challenge to effectively understand and accurately portray African American males. Therefore, this caused African Americans to hide their academic success, which was noted by the participants. For example, one said, "Yes last semester I hide my success, tired of hearing people say I'm smart, I think I'm all that." Another participant stated, "yes I did, I became less vocal about me being a student, did not want to be neither judged nor people make fun of me was not ready to present to everyone I am educated." Overall, higher education institutions need better leaders. In a school environment, the leader was responsive to his/her students' needs and supportive of their personal goals by showing concern, listening to their aspirations, and

communicating personal warmth and openness (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The needs of students must be met, and in order for them to perform at a high-quality level, they must feel respected and a part of the school. Therefore, educators must understand that African American males are haunted by and must overcome the negative portrayals of who they are. Thus, educators must learn as much as possible about the community in which the Black male lives and create a learning environment appealing to and inclusive of Black males.

On the other hand, despite the obstacles, participants identified factors that aided in their success and broke down the perceived obstacles in college. Mentors, Extracurricular Activities, Family Support, Environment and Religion were the five main themes discussed. Mentors, Extracurricular Activities, and Family Support were the highest level of frequency discussed. Participant B stated, "In college I work as a resident director, and that experience allows me the opportunity to gain a lot of knowledge. I work out with judicial affairs; learn to work with students and interact with them, participating in the mentoring program. Overall this helps me develop and kept me educationally motivated." Another participant stated, "Transfer student when I came here, for me I had to a work study job at an on campus events. Immediate involvement help define me socially and gave me an opportunity to meet a lot of people, which lead to me being hired as evening operations person in the student center. As a result, build a relationship with professional staff then became hall director, and then finally had a professional position because of my involvement in extracurricular activity." Cuyjet (2006), suggested participation in extracurricular activities could create a positive social climate that can be important for the academic success of African American males and examined the

advantages of developing communication and leadership skills. Therefore, African American males which are able to developed relationships with administrations and community leaders could promote academic success. Kimbrough (1995), submits that African American students who are involved in campus activities in general are more likely to experience higher degrees of leadership development and perceive the value of leadership skills more positively than are uninvolved and unaffiliated students.

Participants discussed the value of having a mentor as well as student involvement and family support in being successful in higher education. Participant C stated, “having a mentor was most significant experience. He saw potential in me. He took time to make me better when no one else cared, responsible for me attending college.” According to the research, Cuyjet (2006) concluded that initiatives aimed at encouraging more African American males to attend college and increasing their participation and retention, including mentoring initiatives and summer bridge programs, has proven successful in enhancing African American males college preparation, and reducing the high school attrition rate. Secondly, Irvine (1990) reported that African American children whose parents verbalized their academic expectations of their children and supported these expectations with behaviors that reinforced these academic expectations contributed to academic achievement and positive educational outcomes. The power of the males' family and community culture overwhelmingly contributed to their academic success even when considering their marginal performance on standardized tests and other traditional quantitative indicators of academic readiness (Kunjufu, 2001). Participant E stated, “education I knew I had to be involved in it. It was an expectation of my parents. Learn to enjoy education, which I think is missing from



students of color. I had an early experience to feel a great deal of satisfaction of education. This was just an expectation from parents, so identification with education came young.” Also, “it is no accident, then that after centuries of murders, atrocities, floggings, lynching, rebuke, discrimination, oppression, alienation, exploitation, degradation, and human devaluation, we are still alive nevertheless alive and kicking” (Stewart, 1997, p.133). To survive with dignity and hope with our souls and minds reasonably intact is quite another, and it is precisely our spirituality that has enabled us to survive, to maintain hopeful optimism on ‘slender threads’ to keep striving for excellence in all things notwithstanding our peril and plight (Stewart, 1997). African American spirituality provided Black males with a means of living fearlessly and having a sense of unwavering personal strength in relation to one’s enemies. Also, the church has been one of the primary places where African spirituality maintains its importance and survival. A majority of African American male college students used religion and spirituality as a pivotal part in their growth and development. Participant E provided insight on religion by stating, “religion impacted me in a positive direction, parents instill in me religion, church gave tools and ideals to the value of education.”

## Conclusions

The lives and experiences of academically successful Black men are important. Being an academically high achieving African American male from a working class, poor family and growing up in a community that sometimes supported and sometimes rejected young people who wanted to do well in school, proved to be a life defining experience for me. Through sheer will and determination, overcoming challenges and prevailing to obtain academic success was a goal that was not compromised. However,

these accomplishments did come at a price. The findings of this study generally confirmed that success of African American males in higher education does exist and must be heard. Despite the ongoing barriers in higher education, there are African American males who are beating the odds. The participants believed they had a great experience at Rowan University because they have an overwhelming amount of resources that aided in their success in the higher education. All participants in this study were involved in a mentoring program, Residential Learning, Multicultural Affairs, Admissions, and Student Activities. Cuyjet (2006), suggested participation in extracurricular activities could create a positive social climate that can be important for the academic success of African American males and examined the advantages of developing communication and leadership skills. Therefore, African American males which are able to develop relationships with administrators and community leaders could promote greater academic success. Also, strong family support influences success for African American males in higher education. For example, the majority of participants in the study mentioned having strong family support in education. Moreover Conchas (2006), states in his study that African American high achieving students cited three major sources of their school engagement and motivation to succeed: (a) the importance of family and home life, (b) the significance of adult role models, and (c) the role of the school context. On the other hand, barriers for African American male's success in higher education still exist. The participants identified negative stereotypes continue to be a blueprint to distracting African American males' growth as students in higher education. For example, the issue of safety was a major factor that influenced the participants' ability to achieve at a high level. By safety, it is not simply defined in terms

of physical well being, but also includes intellectual safety to pursue academic excellence without fear of negative stereotypes. Having the opportunity to enroll in the most advanced and challenging courses available without ridicule. To be safe psychologically from peers and adults and not have to endure assaults on their desire to be the best they can be. And to be safe emotionally to have their feelings affirmed and validated.

Hall and Rowan (2001), concluded that it is not the African American male who is failing to persist in higher education, but it is higher education that is failing to provide a learning environment that is conducive to the needs of African American males. Therefore, campus environment, curriculum, faculty, and administrators are all key success factors for African American males.

Additionally, family backing is critical for a young male if he is to thrive academically. But if there is little support from the family, outside adults can play a pivotal role in supplying encouragement for the male. A mentoring program is imperative for the African American male community in higher education. By offering consistent action and words of encouragement, a space for completing school assignments, and facilitating participation in activities that interest the male are all behaviors that can contribute to this support

Overall, according to Harrington and Broadman (1997), many African American males learn and succeed in school despite circumstances that include low socioeconomic status, minimal teacher expectations, and inadequate representations of their successes. These young men overcame the barriers of economic disenfranchisement and social ostracism to flourish academically. They recognized the structural constraints in society, but they became determined not to allow these barriers to impede their social mobility

(Conchas, 2006). Despite the fact current literature ignores African American males' success in education, it is important to analyze and address the attitudes of those African American males that are successful in higher education.

#### Recommendations for Practice

1. Black Greek Letter Organizations should partner with Multicultural Affairs and develop a mentoring programs tailored to high school African American males students.
2. Implement more curriculum and programs tailored towards African American males' students.
3. Other avenues of student affairs such as Student Activities, Residence Life, Honors Concentration, Student Government Association should increase their marketing opportunities to the African American male population on campus.
4. Administrators and faculty should engage in more dialog about African American male identity and development on a college campus.
5. African American males should be encouraged by faculty and staff to reach out to non-ethnic groups.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

1. Future research could examine in detail the components of what academically successful African American males consider is an appropriate "way of being" as both smart and Black.
2. Future research could examine students in the "minority" status. Issues of

alienation, isolation, loneliness, and feeling "less than" their white counterparts. This may accompany the transition to this new environment when attending a PWI.

3. Measurement of success should be analyzed and correlated to African American males who are members of the Educational Opportunity Fund versus males who are non-Educational Opportunity Fund members.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



February 24, 2010

Cory L. Boone  
10 Davidson Street  
Belleville, NJ 07109

Dear Cory L. Boone:

In accordance with the University's IRB policies and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to inform you that the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your project:

IRB application number: 2010-127

Project Title: The Dream is Alive: A Study of Selected African American Males' Success in Higher Education

In accordance with federal law, this approval is effective for **one calendar year** from the date of this letter. If your research project extends beyond that date or if you need to make significant modifications to your study, you must notify the IRB immediately. Please reference the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

Please retain copies of consent forms for this research for three years after completion of the research.

If, during your research, you encounter any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, you must report this immediately to Dr. Harriet Hartman ([hartman@rowan.edu](mailto:hartman@rowan.edu) or call 856-256-4500, ext. 3787) or contact Dr. Gautam Pillay, Associate Provost for Research ([pillay@rowan.edu](mailto:pillay@rowan.edu) or call 856-256-5150).

If you have any administrative questions, please contact Karen Heiser ([heiser@rowan.edu](mailto:heiser@rowan.edu) or 856-256-5150).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Harriet Hartman".

Harriet Hartman, Ph.D.  
Chair, Rowan University IRB

c: Burton Sisco, Educational Leadership, Education Hall

Office of Research  
Bole Hall Annex  
201 Mullica Hill Road  
Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701

856-256-5150  
856-256-4175 fax

**APPENDIX B**  
**Informed Consent Form**



**Informed Consent Form**

I agree to participate in a research study entitles "The Dream is a Alive: A Study of Selected African American Males Success in Education," which is being conducted by Cory Boone as an assignment in fulfillment of the Master's Degree in Higher Education Administration at Rowan University. The purpose of this study is to explore the success of African American males in Education at Rowan University. The data collected in this study will be submitted as part of a thesis project.

I understand that my responses will be anonymous and that all data gathered will be confidential. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used for publication or education purpose and that I will not be identified and my name not used.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time.

I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

By signing this letter I am also stating that I am 18 years of age or older. If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study I may contact Cory Boone at (609)-6665-3632 or Dr. Burton Sisco at (856)-256-4500 Ext. 3717.

-----  
Signature of Participant

-----  
Date

-----  
Signature of Investigator

-----  
Date

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions Session 1

Individual Interview Protocol  
Session I

**Part I. Introduction**

This interview is intended to solicit your ideas about your experience being an African American male in higher education. It will be an open ended interview in order to allow you every opportunity to offer your ideas on each aspect of the experiences that we discuss. Feel free to talk about any experiences or ideas that come to mind as we discuss each area.

**Part II. Interview**

1. Where are you from?
2. How did your environment impact your pursuit of an education?
3. How did your family impact your pursuit of an education?
4. What has been the most significant experience in your high school career?
5. What key factors contributed to your high school academic success?
6. What, do you perceive, were obstacles to achieving academic success?
7. How did you overcome those obstacles?
8. What factors would best promote African American male academic achievement?
9. Did you have a mentor while in high school?
10. Did a relative support your academic aspirations?
11. Did any non-relative adult support your academic aspirations?
12. Where you enrolled in advanced courses in high school?

**Closure**

Thank you very much for your time and willingness to share your ideas. As I said before your identity will be kept confidential.

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions Session 2

Individual Interview Protocol  
Session II

**Part I. Introduction**

Thank you for continuing with the study. Your willingness to participate makes it possible to learn more about the experience being an African American male in higher education. It will be an open ended interview in order to allow you every opportunity to offer your ideas on each aspect of the experiences that we discuss. Feel free to talk about any experiences or ideas that come to mind as we discuss each area.

**Part II. Interview**

1. Who inspire you to go to college?
2. Did you always want to go to college?
3. Did religion impact your pursuit of academic success?
4. How would you measure success?
5. Did your peers ever accuse you of being a geek, nerd, acting white or not being cool?
6. Did you ever try to hide your academic success?
7. How has media influenced your conceptions and ideas of masculinity?
8. Who taught you how to be a man?
9. Was there ever a conflict between achieving academically and being masculine?
10. What behaviors did you actively emulate demonstrated your masculinity?
11. Was your masculinity ever called into question by people in your environment?
12. Are you the same person you were your first year in college?

**Closure**

Thank you for your time and consideration in sharing your ideas. As I said before your identity will be kept confidential.

## APPENDIX E

### Focus Group Questions

## *Focus Group Questions*

### **A: Focus Group Profile**

1. How will/do you measure your success at Rowan University? Has this always been the case? How has your definition of success changed? What about success in general, how do you measure that?

### **B: Assessment of Outcomes**

1. Tell me about your classroom experiences at Rowan University. How would you describe your interactions with your teachers and other students in your classes?
2. What about outside the classroom? Do you take advantage of student support services and extra-curricular activities? Do you find these activities helpful?
3. What are some of the questions you have to consider each semester to decide whether you will return to Rowan University? What about finances, grades, work, family or other external factors?

### **C: Attitudes and Involvement**

1. Tell me about all the things you do at the College. Do any of them help you?
2. What personal strengths or challenges do you have that help or prevent you from succeeding at Rowan University?
3. What aspects of the College contribute to your success or create barriers to your success?
4. Do you feel race or gender contributes to or creates barriers your success at Rowan University?