Persisting Through the Inevitable:

A Qualitative Study Highlighting the Communication and Identity Experiences of Black

Male Students at Predominantly White Institutions

by

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ABSTRACT

Black male students experience a number of issues related to identity during the persistence process, which have potential to deter them from graduating. Some of these issues include feeling isolated and lack of access to resources due to their ethnic and/or racial identities. Recent statistics indicate that though there is an increase in college enrollment for Black students, the graduation rate is disproportionate to their enrollment. Using critical race theory, co-cultural theory, and communication theory of identity, this study investigated the role of identity in the persistence of Black male students' graduation rates. Specifically, the central question was 'What role, if any, do identity processes play in Black male students' decisions to continue or depart from a Predominantly White Institution?' In order to answer this question, fifteen first-generation Black male college students were interviewed in order to understand the specific experiences that impacted them in relation to graduation. The study sample included a subset of Black male athletes who were found to have distinct differences in college experiences based solely on their athlete status. The overall results indicate that Black male students have expectations of the persistence process and that their personal identity also plays a significant role in the persistence process. In order to maintain their identities and continue with coursework, Black males enacted persistence strategies that were consistent with an overall goal of graduating. Research findings suggest that Black males must maintain a strong personal identity in order to maintain their personal commitment to graduation and college institutions can support them in this endeavor. Research outcomes also suggest that Black males should have a plan of persistence upon entering college, which is constantly reinforced as a graduation motivator.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Black[1] students who attend Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) have low

retention rates and scholars have identified various causes for these low rates. Some

suggest that Black students still face a subtle process of exclusion in academic

institutions through a covert set of barriers (Massey, 2006), are treated differently from

their White counterparts, have access to fewer resources, and generally receive less

institutional and social support (Feagin, Vera & Imani, 1996). Further, a lack of support

results in students feeling excluded from academic and social life and leads to reduced

participation in the institutional activities, which affects their sense of identity (White &

Shelly, 1996). Interaction with others on the PWI campus has the potential to shape

student decisions about whether to continue to graduation; self-concept and identity

likely also play a role in these decisions. To date, there has been no communication study

that investigates the role identity might play in the Black student experience at PWI

campuses and how those experiences contribute to their decision to complete their

education on these campuses. This dissertation research proposes to understand, from the

student perspective, whether racial and ethnic identities play a role in Black student

experiences and subsequent decisions to matriculate at PWI institutions.

The impetus for undertaking such a study follows from an evaluation of the first

edition of the State of Black Arizona Report (2008)-a report modeled after the National

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[1]   Black and African American will be used interchangeably throughout this research study. These
terms will refer to those individuals who are of African American descent and self-identify as such. It also
acknowledges that Black refers to the African American experience and that those being referred to adopt
this definition as well. These terms do not refer to other types of Blacks in America, which can include
Africans, Haitians, Dominicans, etc.

Urban League's State of Black America. This report describes the meaning of specific statistics related to the resources available to African Americans in Arizona in the areas of education, health care, the economy, culture, and leadership. The report states that in Arizona there are a higher than average number of Black students completing high school and in 2008, Black students completed high school at a rate of 24% compared to the state average of 22% for all students. In addition, the report also stated that there was a higher than average percentage of Black individuals with some college experience or an associate's degree (42%), but only 14% of Arizona's Black population had a Bachelor's degree, which was below the state average of 16%. The discrepancy between these two statistics implies that some impediment(s) encountered by African American college students exist that have the potential to prevent them from persisting to graduation. A review of research in the fields of education and communication illustrated the need for this dissertation research to investigate the understudied experiences of Black male college student identities at PWIs.

Although it has been widely reported that Black males are lacking in the area of college attendance, recent research has found these statistics to be inaccurate. Specifically, Toldson (2012) reported that one area of underrepresentation for Black males is in college graduation rates but not in college attendance and that Black male representation in college is actually proportional to their representation in the general population. In 2011, 32% of Blacks were enrolled in college, which was up from 30% in 2010 (Digest of Education Statistics, 2012). However, there still is a disparity between Black and White male four-year degree attainment; Black males complete college at a rate of 16% while their White counterparts complete at a rate of 32% (Toldson, 2012).

This trend illustrates the need to better understand the Black male experience and persistence to graduation. This research study focused on understanding whether the expression and development of Black male student cultural, racial, and ethnic identities during their college experience play a role in decisions to persist to graduation.

As a Black woman who has attended a PWI as an undergraduate was also one which left me perplexed on many levels as to how to reach graduation. Upon reflection I realize I was lauded for being a college student by friends and family but there were not many people asking or even concerned with whether I would be interested in graduation. It was not clear whether they did not ask or show concern because they knew that I would graduate or because their happiness was satisfied with just the fact that I was an enrolled college student. Or maybe it was that they did not realize that graduation was just as important as being a student. It was not until I brought up graduation to my friends and family at the end of my senior year where the dialogue about graduation began with them. At my lowest times, being a student who felt left out due to being one of a very small number of Black students on campus, graduation and support seemed so far and illusory. After many attempts to define my persistence experience in terms of what I wanted out of life as a pre-business major I still felt like graduation was far from my reach. After being placed on probation I was forced to figure it out. In those moments I would have loved if someone could tell me how to not only successfully get through the experience, but specifically how to graduate. Needless to say I figured it out, eventually.

After my own experiences I have realized the success of college is inherently the success of graduation, not only enrollment and attendance. Maybe conversations about graduation during my persistence process would have been more useful to envisioning

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the end instead of feeling my way around and through the college experience. I also realized that I used the resources I had and knew about to the best of my ability at that time to 'figure it out'. For me, it worked. For others, perhaps they were not as successful in identifying and using those resources. My personal interest in this topic is parallel to the experiences of many Black male college students in that at some point in my undergraduate career I could have been one of those who only attended but did not graduate.

There is a growing disparity between minorities and Whites in terms of college completion according to *The Condition of Education,* a report released in 2014 by the United States Department of Education (Kena et al, 2014). Between 1990 and 2013 the gap in the attainment rate for bachelor's degrees between Whites and Blacks 25-29 years old widened from 13 to 20 percentage points (Kena et al, 2014). Based on statistics also presented by the United States Department of Education in, *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2011) estimates that overall Black enrollment in higher education will increase by 23.8 percent between 2010 and 2020. With such a statistic to predict increasing enrollment, it is important to understand how to serve this population to increase retention once persistence begins. It is possible that the inequalities that Black students experience on PWI campuses could be related to the rate at which Black students graduate from PWIs. Therefore, specific issues related to low retention of Black male students and their departure from institutions of higher learning deserves investigation. It seems possible that for Black students at PWIs, challenges of identity negotiation may be a contributing factor in a Black student's decision to depart from the college setting.

The study of retention from a communication standpoint provides an

understanding of the possible influence of identity processes on persistence in the context of PWIs. In previous literature, several of the solutions posed (i.e. programs, forced and voluntary integration, etc.) do not take into account the actual complex and multidimensional identities of the students and social integration models are focused heavily on student adaptation rather than institutional change. Identity is multifaceted and complex (Hecht et al, 2003). Current research views identity in its complexity as presented by the communication theory of identity (CTI) which illustrates identity as having four frames in which individuals interact with others. This is in contrast to previous seminal literature, which views the student identity as one-dimensional.

Design Overview and Research Questions

A review of retention literature leaves important questions to answer in reference to the persistence processes of Black students and the elements that motivate them to stay at PWIs and graduate. Previous research identifies several issues relevant to student departure from college but does not delve into the actual issues that these students deal with and their strategies to overcome obstacles during the persistence process. Therefore, this dissertation research will be conducted through in-depth interviews with Black college students who graduated from college.

Critical race theory (CRT) framed the dissertation research by illustrating the broad perspective of embedded racism in which people of color function and the commonplace nature of racism encountered in many contexts, including academic institutions. CRT guided and informed the process for acknowledging power and societal inequities in the macro-context as a backdrop for understanding how it might impact Black male student experiences in the microcontext of PWIs. Additionally, this work is

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situated within an interpretive paradigm while critical perspectives have been used throughout to inform the foundation for conducting this type of research. As demonstrated by Thompson & Collier (2006), critical and interpretive perspectives can work in dialectic relationships in qualitative research studies. A critical perspective calls attention to structural forces that govern interactions in social settings while an interpretive perspective aids in the description of cultural identification issues and relational accounts in these interactions.

Building on the theoretical foundation of critical race theory, communication theory of identity (CTI), and co-cultural theory, this dissertation study sought to understand the role of identity in Black student persistence at PWIs. Specifically, the central question addressed through this research is, 'What role, if any, do identity processes play in Black male students' decisions to continue or depart from the PWI campus?' The topic of identity was explored utilizing the construct of Black student retention and contextualized within specific interaction processes of Black students with others while in PWIs. The research questions and their sub-questions that guided the interviews in order to answer the central research question are:

RQ1: What are the expectations of Black male students during the periods related to before, during and after the PWI persistence process?

RQ2: According to Black male students, which identities were relevant to the persistence experience?

RQ3: According to Black male graduates, is the value of social support related to the development of identity processes during the PWI experience?

RQ4: According to Black male graduates, is the value of institutional support

related to the development of identity during the PWI experience?

Rationale

Retention Study and Communication. Previous retention research implies that communication processes are important, worthy of study, and relevant to a number of key issues in minority student retention at the college-level. Processes that impeded student persistence like isolation (Daddona & Cooper, 2002), lack of acceptance (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007), and feelings of invisibility (Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley, 2008) relate to areas of support and identity, which are frequent topics of study in the field of communication. Communication literature related to college student experience has previously addressed the student relationship to classroom practices in areas such as teacher perception of students (Kramer & Pier, 1999) and college success (Rubin & Graham, 1988). However, previous investigations of communication of identity and support imply that effective communication processes in social and academic adjustment to college are indicators for student persistence and retention. More recently, scholars of communication have come to agree that communication plays a major role in the quality of support in the everyday experiences of college students on and off campus (Thompson & Mayzer, 2013).

The findings of this dissertation research will be beneficial to both students and institutions. Retention is of particular concern for most institutions and is defined as, "…the ability to retain a student from admission to the university through graduation" (Seidman, 2005, p. 7). The study of minority student retention at PWIs has the potential to elucidate strategies that promote a higher rate of Black graduates by creating institutional retention strategies to encourage and sustain the persistence processes.

The 2010 Census shows that Blacks comprise 13.6% of the United States (US) population, and the recorded rate of degree attainment for Blacks age 25 and older was 17% overall. This rate lagged behind Whites and Asian populations and was barely ahead of Hispanics at 13%. The 2010 Census also reported that Blacks with a college degree earn an average annual income of $27,000, while those with only a high school diploma will earn an average annual income of $18,000. In the US, Blacks remain at lower socio-economic income levels than their White counterparts regardless of educational attainment (Aud, Fox & KewalRamani, 2010). Higher earnings are associated with higher educational attainment (Aud, Fox & KewalRamani, 2010). These statistics indicate that in order to stay competitive in the job market, degree attainment is important for Black individuals (Abel & Deitz, 2014). This dissertation research about minority student retention and its relationship with racial and ethnic identity illustrates a nuanced understanding of the issues that may influence Blacks to continue and complete their college education or stop attending altogether.

This introduction outlines the importance of investigating the role of identity processes in the successful persistence of African American male college students. The chapters that follow provide the relevant background literature and methodological plan carried out in this dissertation research. Specifically, Chapter Two outlines the theoretical foundation of the research including Critical Race Theory (CRT), Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), and Co-cultural Theory, and describes how these theories together formed a seamless foundation guide the study and the relevant research conducted on the topic of identity processes and African American students and gaps in the extant literature is explored. Chapter Three explains the research philosophy,

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including the metatheoretical assumptions, that guided this qualitative study and describes the participants and methods used by the researcher. Chapter Three ends with an exploration of data analysis methodology and an interpretation of the data. Chapter Four summarizes the research findings and offers answers and insights into the research question and sub-questions. Chapter Five theoretically and pragmatically discusses the implications of the research findings while also elaborating on the application of these findings to the institutional education setting. Finally, Chapter Six expounds on the research contributions at the micro and macro-context levels and discusses the direction of future research and limitations that may face future research endeavors with this population.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This chapter presents the three theories that form the foundation of this research

study. Critical race theory and critical pedagogy informed the macro-context of this study

by describing the societal and institutional racial hierarchies in which all communication

encounters occur. The theories that inform the micro theoretical contexts and data

analysis of the study are communication theory of identity and co-cultural theory. A

discussion of the relevant previous research on identity, as well as identifying current

gaps in the literature, and a presentation of the research questions addressed in this

dissertation research are also included.

Critical Race Theory: Informing the Context for this Study

Critical race theory (CRT) informed the context for this dissertation research and

is grounded in the assumption that broader issues related to power, race, inequality, and

social justice impact an individual's subjective reality. Concerns about Black student

retention in institutions of higher education must address the racist remnants of American

history and are still characterized by institutional discrimination, oppression, domination,

and a power differential, which are all maintained by existing American social and

political structures and the ruling elite (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

CRT provides a context for understanding unequal access to campus resources by

Black students and a lack of institutional consideration for cultural/ethnic/racial

differences in programming and academic structuring. Communication scholars have

documented how the silent power of White privilege operates in many US institutions

and how Whites continue to perpetuate this privilege and exercise embedded power in

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interaction with non-dominant racial and ethnic groups. This privilege is mostly unacknowledged and unspoken, "Whites don't see their viewpoints as a matter of perspective. They see it as the truth" (Taylor, 1998, p. 122). Many scholars agree that this type of dominant paradigm and approach to power takes precedence over other realities, creating institutional structures and expectations that exclude people of color and eradicate spaces for people of color to dialogue about current social situations and inequalities. Cultural assumptions can lead to exclusionary practices that discourage dialogue about race and further perpetuate the behavior of the dominant group to exert its power in ways that leaves others powerless and mute (McPhail, 2004). Such assumptions and silencing of the lived experiences of people of color are a form of White racism and are propagated by both individuals and institutions (McPhail, 2004).

Expected behavior patterns and markers of success, especially those that resist the person-of-color counter narrative and are plagued by color blindness, show that Whites at-large hold power in such a way that the only time minorities succeed is when their goals converge with the interests of their White counterparts. Derrick Bell (1980) termed this concept 'interest convergence' which explains that the attainment of racial equality is attained by acquiescing to Whites who hold the power to change perceptions and society via financial, political, and other means. Bell's (1980) argument remains relevant in several contexts and has been echoed by other researchers. The ability to build the discourse about Whiteness and the inherent, undeserved privileges that accompany it has the power to be transformational and relevant to the overall discussion of race and identity in Black student retention in higher education (Simpson, 2008). This research is grounded in the belief that an academic institution must acknowledge issues of inequality

and accommodate the interests of all its students, including its students of color, to move toward equal access to success on the PWI campus.

Critical race theory began with an effort to expose inequalities in the application of policies, law, and Constitutional rights when applied to African Americans. One characteristic of CRT is that anti-discrimination laws are inadequate measures against persistent and pervasive discrimination and racism in society (Zamudio, Bridgeman, Russell & Rios, 2009). Over the years, CRT scholarship has evolved and now applies to other areas of social inequality (i.e. racism, classism, genderism, etc.) and also applies to other people of color (i.e. LatCrit and the advancement of people of Spanish descent, and TribalCrit toward the advancement of tribal Indian societies). According to CRT, racism is not in decline but is instead less overtly expressed than in the past but just as pervasive. CRT scholars seek to explore how these current ideas and concepts are connected to 'earlier, more overt, practices of racial exclusion' (Taylor, 1998, p.122.); therefore, CRT scholarship is particularly suited to the research questions addressed in this study.

Legal scholar Derrick Bell's, writer of the seminal works in CRT, early work related to law processes and aberrant instances of racism and powerlessness for African American populations in relation to law processes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT scholars who have influenced and promoted similar ideas include Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberle Crenshaw, W.E.B. Dubois, and Henry Giroux together have provided a framework for understanding the pervasiveness of racism as an impetus for progress and change in practical, specific terms.

Although all CRT scholars do not share a common approach to using or interpreting CRT, most believe that there are three common societal characteristics that fuel the need for such a theory and area of study. First, CRT posits that racism is ordinary and leads to the second characteristic where societally Whites are the dominant race over minorities, which serves specific and important societal purposes. The third and final characteristic of CRT explains that race and races are products of social thought and are not fixed phenomena (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). These three tenets come together to conclude that minority populations can and will be racialized at any given moment by the dominant population to serve any majority interest due to embedded overt and covert racism. In the area of education, CRT scholars believe that, "[educational] inequalities are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.47). As illustrated by this statement, these views hold true to many contexts beyond those originally explored with regard to application of laws in which the purpose was to, "intervene, engage, discover and expose the law's racial agenda" (Jones, 2006, p. 2); CRT now applies to other disciplinary areas beyond the law, including education and sociology. This theory relies on the objective and fixed historical truth that people of color (who are also gendered and products of social classes with differing cultural capital), both in the past and currently, have been discriminated against due to race and racism.

Developed by W.E.B. DuBois (1903) as a response to the problem of the 'color line' in his groundbreaking text, *Souls of Black Folk;* several historical events influenced need for the development and movement of CRT. Of the most popular and fitting is the

use of *Brown v. Board of Education,* as an example of a movement toward the end of racial segregation in public education using a CRT perspective. However, since this 1954 ruling, race, racism, and discrimination continue to be issues in education, not only for African Americans but all people of color. In the current research investigating Black college students' identity processes and experiences in PWI, may intersect with issues of covert discrimination in terms of opportunities and equal access to resources in the academic context.

The Critical Pedagogical Tool of CRT, Race and Retention. In scholarship that is related to CRT, the 'big tent' (McArthur, 2010) of critical pedagogy encompasses many beliefs about what is actually considered critical scholarship and pedagogy; however, the final aim of critical pedagogy is for "changes in society in the direction of social justice" (McLean, 2006, p. 1). Research undertaken for the sake of not only creating knowledge but also using that knowledge to transform communities, individual thought processes, and social processes has implications beyond the research process itself and has critical pedagogical implications (McArthur, 2010). Critical pedagogy and critical analysis is ongoing and this type of research in higher education stands as a tool positioned by the past/present/future dialectic in that it identifies what is needed to foster a positive learning environment by analyzing the current situation based on historical patterns. Its benefits are twofold: first, it serves to transform an outside world through academic teaching and second, this transformation then sends learners out into a world to educate through acknowledgment and performance of these ideals. Although this dissertation research was not interested in analyzing the role of race dynamics, it was founded on the assumption that race and racism impact the range of possibilities of

interaction in societies and communities. Since racism has been found in the broader American political macro-context, it so follows that it is also real in microcosmic societies and communities (e.g. academic institutions) that are expected to benefit from such racially embedded laws and policies.

Based on the scholarship of Giroux (1992) which rejects the separation of school and society, current retention research aims to situate the relevance and influence of society on an institution with the claim that social events and edicts are directly related to organizational and institutional decisions within societies because they all follow the same structure of laws and rules. Critical race theory scholars seek to find ways in which critical processes and acknowledgement of disparate conditions can aid in the restructuring of institutions to move toward social transformation. Social policies and laws notwithstanding, CRT scholars may not have the capacity to change certain structures, but can acknowledge the importance of the impact on social processes. The work of CRT scholars is to reteach the meaning of social texts in such a way as to challenge and change broader social thought processes. This research acknowledges the color-blind mentality of higher education programming and also seeks, through the voices of Black students, to discuss the ways in which race and racial identity are approached in retention (or not) and where the discussion and effort falls short.

Any study relating to minority retention at PWIs cannot be undertaken without considering the societal implications of racist paradigms and their immediate impact on social systems. CRT provides a framework for such considerations; "CRT is committed to advocating for justice for people who find themselves occupying positions on the margins-for those who hold 'minority' status'" (Trevino, Harris & Wallace, 2008). Much

of the CRT literature focuses on interest convergence, the power of storytelling and counter stories, and Whiteness as property (Charles, 2008). The literature illuminates the Black student experience in exploring the power differential encountered by minorities, as non-dominant groups, as they navigate in PWI contexts and has identified significant amounts of institutional racism in PWIs (Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005; Grier-Reed Madyun & Buckley, 2008).

Tierney (1999) discussed the concept of cultural capital in relation to the academic institutions; namely when students can garner cultural capital, it is likely that they will feel more accepted in the academic community and surrounding areas, which allows for a certain level of cultural integrity. "Cultural integrity in the context of schooling is those school-based programs and teaching strategies that engage student's racial/ethnic backgrounds in a positive manner toward development of more relevant pedagogies and learning activities" (Tierney, 1999, pg. 84). This reflects what is needed to retain students in a positive manner at PWIs. When personal characteristics such as racial backgrounds are considered in structuring the academic environment, institutions are using their power in a more positive way by acknowledging differences and moving forward in shaping an environment where individual student differences are of value to the overall progress of the institution.

Conversely, Tinto's (1993) widely discussed 'model of retention' requires that minority students break from their cultural and community ties, in order to effectively assimilate into the framework of the institution. In this model, Black students are expected to submit to the institution's inherent power by turning away from their cultural

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communities, which potentially were the very relationships that fostered successes that made attending college possible. Tierney (1999) suggested that such an institutional structure renders students' cultural backgrounds irrelevant to their successful collegiate experience and suggests that if students are to succeed in college, "those backgrounds must be discarded in favor of the dominant cultures of their institutions" (p.82). This exemplifies how individual identities are erased and illustrates that there are only certain identities that are welcomed into the institutional space. According to Tinto (1993), it is when students join education institutions that they renegotiate and reorder their identities to satisfy the expectations of the environment, but not necessarily the student. Moreover, students can and will find that some identities, potentially those that are important to maintain for a successful career, are rendered of less value for the duration of their college experience.

Communication Theory of Identity (CTI)

Identity is a part of everyday experience regardless of context. Communication theory of identity (CTI) describes the complexity of identity and how it impacts everyday interaction (Hecht, 1993). CTI states that identity has four layers, which are constructed independently of one another and include the personal, enacted, relational, and communal. This theory stresses the importance of knowing that these layers of identity can coexist and can be in contradiction to one another making identity a complex construct. When identities are in contradiction with each other while in college, it is possible that this contributes to negative outcomes such as student departure from school. For example, if a student's cultural identity is in contradiction with the demands of a

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student identity put forth by the institution, it may change the way a student views the value of the PWI experience, thus facilitating the decision to leave the PWI.

Co-cultural Theory

Orbe (1998) provided another framework to further develop an understanding of whether identity plays a role in the persistence process from the standpoint of graduated Black college students in this study. Previous research using co-cultural theory found that Black students feel like they are sometimes not accepted culturally and have to constantly navigate between two worlds. Co-cultural theory further situates the concept of identity processes in the context of a cultural dialectic of the PWI and is grounded in standpoint theory and muted group theory. One of the main premises of this theory is that members of the dominant groups in any society create and maintain the norms of communication. As such, members of less dominant cultural groups communicate in such ways that reflect the power and hierarchical structure of these norms. Co-cultural theory identifies the existence of specific micro-level patterns of interactions between members of dominant and less dominant groups, an understanding that complements the macro-level perspective of critical race theory. Using co-cultural theory to understand the cultural starting point of Black college students in relation to the PWI can reveal how students understand their social position upon entering college and how that position is affected by the level of support they receive from the PWI.

The complexity in identity as described by Hecht's (2003) communication theory of identity (CTI) and the explanation of power in the PWI context as described by Orbe's (1998) co-cultural theory have the potential to address the interconnectedness of communication culture and power on the PWI campus. Outcomes of this study based on

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the voices of Black students at PWIs have potential to influence educational institutions to consider identity processes when creating spaces that are supposed to be welcoming and supportive of their Black student population.

Identity

CTI suggests that identity can occur on many levels beyond the previously researched interactions between person and society and different, co-existing identities can contradict or be in contention with one another. Contradiction between different expected identities is called an 'identity gap' meaning there is a gap or contradiction between the meaning and expression of one identity as it coexists with another (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003). Where there is tension between personal identities, students may attempt to reorder their identity traits to accommodate the tensions with the university, which might then influence decisions to depart the school setting.

Identities are plural, a reflection of culture and are formed in relation to how Blacks relate themselves to others and other things therefore all communication interactions occur within a cultural context, "Black communication is grounded in Black cultural identities" (Hecht et al., 2003, p. 3). The connections between culture, power and communication are inseparable; when Black students communicate at the PWI, they reflect an identity that is constructed by the group culture in which it was created and the power that is permitted by the cultural space in which they exist.

When Black students communicate their identity on the college campus, it is important to understand the meaning of those identities in relation to the overall institutional power structure in which they are created and maintained. Consideration should be given to the campus culture that either allows or disallows those identities to

become present and salient. Overall, the issue connected to low Black student retention may be related to identity processes.

        Identity and Social Interaction. Identity processes are a large part of everyday experience and emerge through communication processes, in interaction with others, co-constructed with others, and can constantly be renegotiated (Abrams, O'Connor & Giles, 2002). PWIs present one of many contexts for understanding how identity processes are shaped and their role in the persistence processes for Black students. Identity is a multifaceted construct; individuals have more than one identity and each will "provide expectations for behavior and motivate individual's behavior" (Gudykunst, 2002, p. 191). One aspect of identity includes the reciprocal communicative relationship between an individual's identity and the societies, communities, groups and people with which they interact. Identity in a communicative view is usually defined as dialectic between person and society, which is constructed through communication (Hecht et al., 2003). The experience Black students have while attending PWIs is influenced by the ways they the campus and it resources, and also the way they can cultivate a sense of belonging at the PWI.

        The context of attending courses at PWIs plays a role in shaping identity and the individuals involved during interactions with others and the institution. The complex nature of identity begs an understanding of its interrelated parts and its overall importance to everyday life; "[r]elationships help shape personal understanding, while at the same time relationships are formed out of personal identities" (Hecht & Faulkner, 2000, p. 373). On the PWI campus, identity formation and negotiation is an everyday process that allows Black students to navigate the campus and resources to maintain a

satisfying and positive experience. At this point it is unknown whether the quality of those processes has an impact on student decisions to continue to on the PWI campus and complete their degree.

Symbolic interaction research helps to explain how the self and the social environment shape each other through communication (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). PWIs have the power to aid in shaping Black students into college graduates through providing a sense of belonging. Being acknowledged as a valued student by an institution is equivalent to an effort to also acknowledge the extended set of dynamics, which stem from and/or complement the student identity. The dynamic of possessing multiple identities and navigating co-occurring identity development processes is an important and relevant issue to the area of minority retention in higher education, specifically student persistence toward graduation at PWIs. Interaction and socialization contribute to identity formation and the simple act of claiming an identity is often not simple at all (Spurgeon & Myers, 2010). Claiming an African American identity becomes a process of self-clarification and group negotiation during interaction to maintain a status of belonging and equality while at a PWI. This goal is ongoing and parallel to the goal of the African American identity in society at large; in this respect, the PWI experience is a microcosm of the everyday realities African Americans encounter in the US.

Co-cultural theory states that communication does not happen in a fixed state and instead a negotiation of power and identity between minority and dominant group members. In relation to the integration models that strive to show how student adaptation results in better academic and/or social success, the co-cultural theory framework explains how Black students in a PWI context may engage in an adaptation processes

through constant negotiation of identity and power. Because of the unfixed nature of communication, identities can start to contradict themselves more and more and it is at this stage hat the points of CTI and co-cultural theory converge.

  Identity Construction in the Academic Context. The literature indicates that the college context plays a critical role in identity formation and is used as a tool for developing other personal and professional roles and identities (Lounsbury, Levi, Leong & Gibson, 2007). For some students, college is a confusing experience where the process of persistence is not only about being academically successful but finding ways to fit into a new, uncharted environment (Jehangir, 2009). The construct of 'fitting in' is essentially when the support and acknowledgement of student identity by others and the institution occurs; while context allows students to express a range of identities which can be present in a situation based on the people with whom they are interacting. This does not negate the fact that students may also form identities, which are atypical to a certain context because of changes in the immediate value of any one identity at a given time. For example, a student who also has an identity as a cousin may find that the cousin identity is not as salient to being a student. Overall, the range of identities a student can have either by choice or group affiliation will be based on personal preference and the connection one might make with particular settings

  The way in which young adults conceive of themselves as college students and the way they formulate racial-ethnic identities is related to self-esteem and academic performance (Jaret & Reitzes, 2009). A sense of identity and the formation of an identity is partially derived from how students feel while on the college campus and in relation to the college campus social expectations of them, which both have an effect on the level of

academic success an individual experiences. It seems likely that Black students' sense of identity is impacted through their interaction with other students, faculty, and administrators during their tenure at the PWI.

Participation in educational systems is a complex experience when it involves a constant negotiation of multiple identities. Two identities that are particularly important to many young adults are their identities as both college students and as members of racial or ethnic groups (Jaret & Reitzes, 2009). Students participate in the college experience balancing several different identities, which are considered important to each individual for many different reasons. Of those identities, cultural, ethnic, and racial identities are salient and relevant to the overall experience for Black students as they seek to find a place to fit these identities into the university experience and attain success.

Burke & Reitzes (1981) outline three characteristics of identity that further build on the dialectic between person and society. First, identity is a social product created and maintained through social processes; this sociological view of identity highlights the social process needed to communicate identity. For the Black student, interaction with others, negative or positive, will produce an associated identity while at a PWI. Second, interaction with others entails the process of identification and exchange of identities; interaction on the PWI campus will determine how a student chooses to communicate identity to others. Lastly, confirmation and validation of self-concept comes by self-presentation in the form of communication and expression. It could be likely that students need a space to express their identities and when that space is not available due to lack of institutional or social support, there is potential for students to manifest this void through communication patterns that are negatively associated with the university.

This lack of support is essentially the rejection of the expressed identity of the student by the institution and the other members of their education community.

Individuals come to know their group identity through the behaviors that are associated with the group in which they have membership; Abrams et al. (2002) state that group ethnic identity is learned. Ethnic identity is process-oriented and adopted when an individual identifies and embraces the practices of that group. Ethnic identity formation is the interplay between the objective and the subjective; it is the place where an individual's self-identity converges with group expectations for individual member behavior. Hecht et al. (2003) state that it is at this point of agreement where the singular perception of identity expands to include the plurality of identity and the process of trying to maintain personal identities as separate from group identities becomes more salient.

Identity is different from self-identification despite the two concepts often being conflated (Hecht et al., 2003). Identification is the perceived idea that one has an affinity with a group although there is group membership (Hecht et al., 2003). Programs put forth by institutions often group students together based upon university-developed perceptions, rather than highlighting an acknowledgement of identity. Identification is the objective idea outsiders put on individuals to categorize them, while identity is subjective and dependent on the individual's perception of themselves. Although students may show visible membership of a certain group based on visual ethnicity cues and identify as part of that group, it may not be the case that the individual derives an identity from that group membership. If PWIs create support programs for Black students based on perceptions of a common ethnicity, it is quite possible that these students will not reap the intended support goals if they do not have a specific identity in

relation to that ethnicity. Consequently, the goals of a PWI program may be outside the Black student identities and personal expectations of interaction. Since identities are complex and a part of everyday experience, it may be advantageous to understand how they might influence Black students' navigation of their PWI experiences, including participating in institutional-run programs that promote educational advancement.

Black (Student) Identity. The identities of Black students are pluralistic and communicated through behaviors related to the college experience. Black students may employ such tactics as 'code switching' to employ separate identities in order to be perceived as acceptable to the college context. Identities are also indicative of student comfort levels with the college experience and are windows into understanding if they perceive themselves as having value to the institution and overall college experience. Pluralistic identity formation occurs in relation to different contexts and environments like home and school, but also need to be transferable to the PWI context when necessary. Tinto's (1993) student departure theory suggests that students should dissociate themselves from previous racial and ethnic associations to fully integrate into the educational institution. However, other research indicates that the relationship between student identity and academic institutional behavior is reciprocal (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). A student's identity is a direct reflection and acknowledgement of the community of which they are a part and from where they originated.   This same understanding also plays a role in the campus context; adopting Tinto's (1993) suggestion for students to dissociate from their community of origin creates a direct disconnect between everyday behaviors students are used to and the new environment they have joined, creating the potential for daily stresses.

Outside of the college context, in the personal lives of Black students, Black identity is one that is continuously problematized due to its political, cultural, and ethnic meanings. This identity is one that is attached to a culture, which is many times perceived as being monolithic; however, due to other confounding factors like gender and socio-economic status, the experience may be different for each Black individual. Previous research indicates that many Black students report feeling that they are living in two worlds: one where they are accepted and experience interactions that are particular to a personal and cultural (and racial) worldview and one where they create a false identity in order to be accepted. This experience creates a schism between the campus experience and personal experience where students cannot fully be themselves and do not experience the reciprocal relationship discussed by Burke and Reitzes (1981). In places where the visual cue of skin color underscores the expected treatment from the dominant power structure in place, skin color matters for students at PWI (Morrison, 2010). Additionally, Black students report feeling that living in two worlds occurs due to the lack of acceptance or acknowledgement of a cultural world which may be different from the campus majority. Racial and ethnic minority status and characteristics of being from a minority group continues to be an issue on campus which influences integration processes for Black students on college campuses. In many cases, visual cues regarding skin color differences cause students to experience treatment and expectations that equate to academic and social inequality at a PWI. Black identities continue to survive within a context of oppression and it is possible that Black students bring with them perceptions of cultural belonging from an external setting (Asante & Abarry, 1996; Hecht et al., 2003; Jackson, 2000; Karenga, 2002). Steele (1997) discussed these types of instances in

connection to a construct of 'stereotype threat'. Based on implications of identity research, it is possible that preconceived notions of Black student performance, by both instructors and students, affect actual performance on the PWI campus. Black identity must be viewed within the context of the larger cultural system of the United States to fully understand it in the microcosm of the PWI environment where students are subjected to these oppressive social definitions of performance, often without other supports they would have if they were in their communities of origin.

Retention

Students often begin their college career with excitement, anticipation, and perhaps a certain degree of anxiety, yet few students enter college expecting to drop out before graduation (Pompper, 2006). Minority student attrition happens for a number of reasons and is often related to student feelings of isolation (Hughes, Anderson, Cannon, Perez & Moore, 1998), lack of finances , and inappropriate outlets for discussing culturally relevant issues (Grier-Reed, Madyun & Buckley, 2008). In 2005, the average graduation rate for Black students was 42 percent compared to 62 percent for their White counterparts. If this trend continues, with the increase of Black student enrollment estimated for 2020, an alarming 58 percent who begin a college education will not graduate. No known retention research has been conducted on Blacks who have had the PWI experience and graduated; therefore, this research specifically focused on the voices of Black individuals who graduated from traditional four-year PWIs. The study sample was well versed in the undergraduate PWI experience to help explore the central question for this research study.

Student Retention. Retention is one of the most widely studied areas in higher education. A review of previous research has shown retention as a pressing issue and indicates the need for its study. For the university, retention has implications for credibility and financial status (Gilliam & Kritsonis, 2006). Also, for Black and minority students, degree attainment has greater impact on positive life status and access to opportunities in the United States. In early retention studies, a college degree had less impact on life status as college was of little importance, so there was less reason for students to persist toward a degree. As degree attainment has gained traction as a requirement for upward mobility in the US, the number of prospective students has increased and allowed colleges to be selective about who is admitted to the institution. Existing literature indicates that recruitment and retention are interdependent (Feagin et al., 1996). After the application and acceptance process is complete, a student faces additional challenges of being motivated and supported to continue. Retention efforts often focus on students entering college with the intent to graduate and are preparing themselves for life after college.

Minority student retention specifically, continues to be a focal point for many higher education institutions. Access to college and degree completion rates for Black, Hispanic, and Native American students have consistently lagged behind White and Asian students (Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003). The social and institutional disparities between Black students and their White counterparts have been empirically supported as contributing factors in whether students to persist or drop out of university. Minority student retention is an important component of institutional evaluation as a means to explore the process of providing an educational service to students that also involves

providing crucial components to allow students to persist to graduation.

Black Student Retention. A review of the literature relevant to the overall retention of Black students, as well as the specific retention of Black males, reveals the following: PWIs have become more interested in the past several years in strategies to retain their admitted minority student body through to graduation; however, minority student retention is still wanting, especially for Black students. Furthermore, National Center for Education Statistics (2011) reports that Black males are not graduating at competitive rates with their Black female counterparts or their White counterparts. Student retention research has come to recognize that many of the issues minority student's experience are related to a sense of belonging. The role of the PWI in student retention is as important as the student experience itself although much of the retention research highlights the institution and the student independently. The make-up and structure of the institution communicates to students' information about who holds power and either gives equal or limited access to those who interact with it. Issues of access to supports and resources are related to a sense of belonging for minority students and are directly related to retention at many higher education institutions.

A majority of the Black student retention research focuses on undergraduate students; however, Thompson (1999) and Poock (2008) found that retention remains an issue on the graduate level as well for Black students. Trusty (2004) found that when Black males graduate from college, they tended to take longer to complete their degree than their White counterparts. Retention issues are still evident at the graduate level but tend to be overlooked due to the fact that graduate level attendance implicates a perceived notion about students. Researchers view Black graduate student retention differently

because it is assumed that they are more comfortable in a college setting and as such have less tension with the college campus. Despite assumptions, the retention literature indicates that many Black students struggle to find their place on both undergraduate and graduate PWI campuses. Similarly, the paucity of Black men graduating from undergraduate institutions is also reflected in the rate of Black men who complete graduate school. Similar to the undergraduate experience, students of color in graduate studies are also concerned with acceptance and an accepting campus atmosphere (Poock, 2008). The many retention frameworks used to explore and evaluate retention efforts imply that if students are not engaged in the academic institution early in their undergraduate careers, they may not reach graduation.

Many retention rate research studies aim to understand student retention in terms of persistence, which refers to the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion (Seidman, 2005a, p. 7). Scholars interested in persistence have generally focused on what makes a student continue to attend college once enrolled. Researchers have identified several reasons why Black students may decide to leave college, and many of those reasons are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

The complexity of the issues related to Black student retention is alarming and current research efforts are mostly insufficient in addressing core communication issues related to identity, which this study postulated is a contributing factor to low retention rates. Integration and interaction theoretical frameworks are most consistently used across the retention literature operating under the premise that if Black students can integrate themselves comfortably into the college campus setting, they will be more

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likely to succeed and eventually graduate. One of the most frequently used models is evident in Tinto's work (1993) describing the nature of student departure and has been used extensively to explore how majority and minority students become academically and socially integrated into institutional life (Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). It places most of its emphasis on student adaptation rather than institutional change; this integration approach, in connection with the complexity of identity, illustrates that students are at risk of losing personal identities that have meaning, including those attached to relationships that helped them get to college.   Overall, much of the empirical discussion about retention is underscored by the belief that the Tinto model is central in trying to understand retention.

Retention research has also shown that programs implemented by the university specifically to provide support could be useful as a way to influence retention of African American students. Watson et al., (2002) found that programs were only useful however, when they were monitored to ensure they were accomplishing specific tasks. Without significant oversight, these programs wind end up reinforcing the agenda of the university, but not the needs of students for which it is aimed. Programs that are put in place for Black students need to make sure they are beneficial to those students with clear goals and leadership to monitor for effectiveness.

Maldonado, Rhoads & Buenavista (2005) found that student-run programs, rather than those led by the institution, worked more effectively in supporting Black students and helping them to socially acclimate. When Black students leading and in charge of recruiting and informing new students to college, often a quick-forming relational bond is experienced because new students interact with peers who look like them, share similar

backgrounds, and are invested in making the college experience a comforting one that includes support. This type of program has meaningful impact on students because it allowed students not only to feel a sense of community but also helped the new students and current students to build new networks.

Student-based program evaluation is important to understanding retention as relational approaches to programming may explain retention and program implementation issues which are best studied by exploring actual student experiences via qualitative research (Maldonado et al, 2005). Illustrations of this model and other issues related to retention program evaluation include the work of Grier-Reed et al., (2008). In a faculty perspective of student retention, they found that approaching the study of Black student retention by focusing on the support networks students keep as a means of qualitatively evaluating the role of support systems in counteracting campus and societal stressors. Despite the researchers' approach that encouraged participants to communicate their self-perception in their own words, they were not able to distinguish if student identity also contributes to the information students communicated. Previous research findings indicated that students want to feel comfortable and accepted in the college environment and when they are not available, students begin considering departure. In addition, through their peer support networks students were able to discuss things that happened outside of the college campus while still receiving similar support for their college experience. Communicating on the college campus is important and useful if there are outlets for Black students to position themselves in relation to community, society, and the university. In this type of communication interaction of expressing identity, students can notice that discussions about both cultural and outside experiences

are both intellectual and significant. This research study goes beyond previous research findings to decipher if identity plays a role in whether students choose to depart from college prior to earning a degree. Study findings will also help illustrate the need for PWI to focus on implementing programs that provide a platform for self-selected, similar individuals to have access to resources in a space where personal identities are developed, defined, and negotiated in safe, supportive group settings.

Despite the many research studies focused on Black student retention and the many possible solutions other researchers have proposed, current statistics about college graduation rates for Black males suggest that there may be yet unidentified explanations for low retention rates. To explore this gap in the knowledge about Black student retention in college, this study posed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the expectations of Black male students during the periods related to before, during and after the PWI persistence process??

RQ2: According to Black male students, which identities were most important to be able to express freely in the context of the college campus?

RQ3: According to Black male graduates, what is the value of social support during the PWI experience?

RQ4: According to Black male graduates, is the value of institutional support related to the development of identity during the PWI experience?

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter presents the research design and methods used to address the research questions posed. The first section presents the overall qualitative research design, the rationale for the particular paradigmatic approach chosen for the study, and describes potential research bias challenges and how these challenges were addressed. The next section presents information concerning the participants and the data collection procedures and finally, the coding and data analysis procedures are discussed in detail.

Research Design

A qualitative research approach is particularly appropriate in studying identity processes. While quantitative approaches are concerned with "how much, how large or the amount of something" (Kvale, 1996, pg. 67), the aim of this research study was to answer the research questions via first-person participant stories provided by Black male students who had attended PWIs. This method was used as a tool for exploring how the meaning of Black male student' experiences might relate to identity processes that influence retention, which is a current gap in the literature about college student retention.

This study used semi-structured interviews to answer the research questions. Interviewing methodology has a goal of "obtaining qualitative descriptions of the life world of the subject with respect to interpretation of their meaning" (Kvale, 1996, p. 124). This method was appropriate for a number of reasons, including that it enabled better evaluation and understanding of PWI persistence from the perspective of and through the voices of Black males who participated in this study. This methodology is

also valid for this population and research study as, "student voices are often unheard in education" (Hughes et al., 1998, p. 140). Further, the current study participant voices are particularly rare in that they are from Black males who attended college and graduated. Participant interviews for this study also provide a counter-narrative about the reality of being an 'other' while attending school at the PWI. Additionally, the interview data offer a contrast to the dominant reality of White students and the overarching presence of Whiteness on college campuses that Black students must learn to navigate. These voices are beneficial in order to fully understand Black students' identity experiences on the PWI campus as they persist toward graduation and also illustrate the impact of these experiences on their academic success.

One-on-one interviews allowed exploration about the role self-identity played in the decisions of Black students to persist at PWI campuses by providing a setting to discuss the strategies of persistence that lead to graduation rather than just stories of college experience. Interviews allowed for a glimpse into the PWI world based upon multiple perspectives of Black male narratives that all seemed to speak to the significance of Black cultural identity. As a member of the Black community, the researcher was able to establish a level of trust through a shared cultural identity, interest in their 'otherness' on campus, and a common narrative of struggle shared by all Black students on PWI campuses.

A semi-structured interview method also allowed the data to organically emerge in meaningful ways during the data analysis process. Immediately following each interview, the researcher noted influences on and reflections about the interview in brief memos. The intent was not only to account for anticipated leads based upon the stated

study research questions but to also code for any unanticipated leads that developed in the course of the interview (Charmaz, 2001, p. 15). In cases where an unanticipated lead happened during the interview, that lead was incorporated into subsequent interviews to determine if it was a pertinent direction for research exploration rather than an isolated case unique to a single participant. For example, during early interviews participants identified that the idea of Blackness and being Black was something that they held onto as a possession that could not be taken by other people. This led to the development of a sub-question for future interviews about the meaning of that Blackness to gain additional information about this perspective. Ultimately, the formulation of an additional two-part interview question: (a) "What does it mean to be Black and in college?" and (b) "What does it mean to be Black and to have graduated from college?" was created. This process illustrates how semi-structured interviewing allows for openness and changes of sequence and forms of questions in order to delve in to the answers given and the stories told by interviewees (Kvale, 1996, p. 124). Kvale's (1996) method of interviewing highlights the interactive nature of a conversation and welcomes such leads in qualitative research.

In addition to eliciting beneficial data, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to establish rapport by providing thoughtful responses and building on the interviewees' interests in the moment, which also helped encourage participants to engage in a higher level of disclosure. Because this study was particularly interested in the range of specific experiences of each participant, interview questions remained open and all experiences were recorded, even when they were told out of sequence or did not appear directly related to the questions posed to the participant. All responses were

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considered important to the research outcomes as long as they were within the scope of the overall research question.

The interview methods chosen for this research complemented both the CTI and co-cultural theoretical framework as research methods and theory are reciprocally linked (Ellingson, 2008). CTI and co-cultural theory provided a framework for data analysis and assisted in configuring the methodology to design an understanding of identity that revealed meaning of participants' experiences. The concept of cultural identity was highlighted in the interview process in the following ways: participants often spoke specifically in terms of being Black individuals, so it was important to clarify whether the issues raised were perceived to be student issues or Black student issues. This allowed participants to reveal how important their Black identity was and how it played a role in their experiences during persistence. In all cases, participants' Black identity was revealed to be consistently relevant to all their experiences. Exploring identity in the context of the PWI allows for better understanding about how Black student persistence is influenced by an issue of 'otherness'. Participant references to other salient identities throughout the interview process were recorded and used to help explain the identity challenges participants faced and what they experienced when their identities were not supported.

Researcher Bias

The researcher's multiple identities as a Black woman who is also a student and researcher afforded both advantages and challenges. The researcher's geographical location, social, and ethnic background served as an advantage to the study. Previous researchers found that Black students find it more comfortable to discuss life and school

matters with others who look similar to them , and as such sharing a cultural identity with the participants allowed for the establishment of an easy rapport and increased comfort levels during the interview.

On the other hand, as a Black student with extensive experience in PWIs, the researcher is intimately connected to the subject matter and it became necessary to acknowledge any potential bias during the study. The personal cultural struggle at a PWI could affect the researcher's ability to remain objective, however these potential difficulties were acknowledged prior to engaging in the research project and challenges addressed in several ways; constant awareness of potential bias during the interview and data analysis process was crucial. Similarly, common story meanings and assumptions based on participant and researcher background similarities required the extensive use of probing questions to ensure a full understanding of participant experiences rather than over interpreting stories with common or similar themes. Awareness of gender bias could have played a role in collecting and analyzing the data, and therefore the researcher remained vigilant in detecting this potential bias as well.

Researcher biases were examined through self-reflection in the memo-writing process, questioning how personal interests may be influencing the research study, as well as being attuned to biases during the data gathering and analysis phases of the study. At times, it was difficult to remain in the researcher role since the participant's experiences often reflected a community to which the researcher belongs and felt both sympathy and disgust at some of the stories. The issues raised are not new but hearing them shared from a different perspective can trigger a reemergence of anger, causing the researcher to become upset. Previous researchers have discussed effective handling of

bias by having the researcher express sympathy through nonverbal cues and silence thereby allowing for a return to the more formal researcher role and continuing the interview using follow up questions and not pushing participants too hard (Weis & Fine, 2000).

The researcher's own experience as an African American doctoral student who also attended several PWIs resulted in many shared experiences similar to the participants' and resulted in a situation of dual presence that required professional navigation as the researcher was simultaneously an insider and outsider during the study. Examining biases also helped to dissect experiences believed to be common as a Black woman or even as a Black student, but may be viewed differently by Black men. This experience allowed for a data analysis process that reflected the experiences in a way a non-Black researcher would be unable to complete. Consequently, it was imperative that the researcher remain present during the interviews and ask questions that aided in the understanding of participant experience, rather than conflating the multiple role identities of the researcher. An established interview protocol implemented prior to starting interviews further allowed for awareness about the distinction between the researcher and student roles while ensuring researcher authenticity by validating all identities.

Ellis (2003) writes of procedural ethics, situational ethics, and relational ethics in the research process. Procedural ethics are those attached to the university or institution that protects the organization from the work and possible harm that a researcher might unknowingly pose to participants, which is an issue of process and procedure for academic institutions. Both situational and relational ethics are relevant to axiological concerns for this research study due to the researcher's acknowledged biases in the

research process with a subjective set of inherent beliefs that she cannot 'walk away'

from during the research process. The ethnic/racial positions and their influence in the

research process have been explored thoroughly, and as a consequence this study was

completed in an ethical manner by taking into consideration the relational position of the

researcher while providing consideration for welfare due to my participants, which goes

beyond the procedural ethics of the ASU IRB process. Relational ethics were especially

important to the current research project; at times it took more relational interaction as the

researcher for participants to feel comfortable with the research study and when that

occurred, the Black student or Black female role was used to highlight

researcher/participant similarities. Keeping a clear relational ethic allowed for the

creation and management of boundaries for the interview interactions that were safe for

the participants as well as safe for the overall relationship once the study was completed.

The researcher did not engage in personal conversations beyond the scope of the project

and extra conversation during the interview occurred only to the extent that it kept the

participant interested and informed of the project and the significance of such work to a

Black community.

Ellis (2003) stated that adhering to relational ethics also means a researcher

considers the position of a participant; in this study participants were encouraged to speak

freely about the experiences they had on the PWI campus, without researcher judgment.

Having a strong sense of relational ethics allowed for the development of trust that

enabled participants to reveal potentially sensitive information; topics that are often

embarrassing or unspeakable in social contexts arose during several interviews in part

due to the trusting nature of the interview setting. Any research experience can result in

an indefinite number of data analysis interpretations, but usually researchers develop those that they find most plausible, insightful, and/or useful (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Relational ethics became an ethic of care for participants and they were never pushed to share beyond their level of comfort. Although interviews were intended to last approximately one hour, timing remained very flexible and responsive to interviewees' comfort levels. They were encouraged to take their time and that they were in charge of the topics discussed, the degree to which they wanted to disclose information, and the amount of time spent in the interview.

Qualitative analysis allows researchers to 'tell the story' of their participants. Ellingson (2005), states that the qualitative researcher must bracket the voices and listen to the data. In this research I had to bracket an assumption that having some potentially similar lived experiences as a Black individual gave the researcher a better position to hear the voices of this research study. As this assumption could have resulted in missed meanings and taking for granted the stories being told, instead close attention was paid to the voices of participants by trying to understand the perspective of their experiences as Black men in the PWI context.

Participants

There were five original criteria for interviewees to participate in this study, they needed to be: (a) a first generation college student, (b) male, (c) self-identified as Black or African American, (d) had attended and graduated from a PWI and (e) had graduated within the past five years. Research shows that first-generation students are raised in environments where their cultural identity is reinforced; however, it is possible that it is

the opposite on college campuses because of the negotiation of their cultural identity (Owens, Lacey, Rawls & Holbert-Quince, 2010). This situation leaves a valid gap in the knowledge that allows for studying the development and function of identity for Black males on college campuses.

Finding interviewees who met all the initial criteria became problematic; therefore the time parameter of being five years from graduation was expanded to include students in their last semester of undergraduate work or who had graduated in the past 10 years. This time frame was selected to ensure that participants were able to sufficiently recall experiences from the recent past, which is still indicative of current social matters related to this research study area.

Fifteen potential participants were initially recruited for this project; of those, three were ineligible, as they did not meet all criteria to be interviewed. Two of the three were not first-generation students but fit the other criteria and the third attended a Historically Black College or University but also met the rest of criteria. These three potential participants were excluded from the study and three more fully eligible interviewees were recruited and interviewed in their place. All participants included in the final study were first-generation Black male students who graduated from a PWI within the past 10 years.

Recruitment Techniques. Study participants were initially recruited by posting flyers to two active African American online listserv forums as well as calling participants through the Arizona State University (ASU) Campus Network, which houses student groups and student offices that support minority students. Ultimately, these methods did not yield eligible participants and required a restructuring of the recruitment

materials and use of other methods to gather potential study participants. Through a combination of snowball and convenience sampling using personal networks of connections to a Black student population that included deans, instructors, and other professionals in the educational field, a recruitment email was widely distributed in an effort to recruit eligible study participants. The call for participants expanded the eligibility criteria to include those who were in their last year of college or who had graduated in the previous 10 years. The expansion of the graduation timeline criteria yielded additional study participants, which resulted in the recruitment of fifteen eligible individuals to participate in the study.

This sampling technique along with modification of the study participation criteria was critical to finding participants who were interested and willing to talk about their experiences as Black students and about being a minority on the PWI campus. The people referring participants during the recruitment process also served as gatekeepers who vouched for the legitimacy and personal safety of the study, allowing participants to feel comfortable in volunteering to share their stories.

Data Collection Procedures

After gaining approval for this research endeavor from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Arizona State University, and contacting the eligible participants who agreed to be interviewed with no remuneration, an agreed upon time and place for the interview was established. Due to the difficulty of finding participants, nine of the 15 interviews were conducted telephonically and the time (and place for face-to-face) for interviews was negotiated between the researcher and participant. All participants were either emailed or handed a hard copy of the consent form mandated by ASU IRB at or

before first contact. The Consent to Participate form was approved by the ASU IRB and outlined that interviews would be recorded and data would be used for research purposes; it also stated the specific purpose of this study.

Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 75 minutes with an average time of 60 minutes. As noted earlier, each participant talked as long as they thought necessary to answer the interview questions. Participation was voluntary and participants were told they could choose to discontinue participation at any time during the interview and/or analysis process; they were also reminded that they could opt to have the primary researcher discard any or all data they contributed to the study. They were reminded that participant information from this research would remain confidential throughout the study process including analysis, dissertation defense, and study publication. Identifying information was kept on a password protected laptop that was in the possession of and only available to the primary researcher during the interview and data analysis process..

During the interviews, participants were frequently asked if they were comfortable, were ready to move on to another question, or would like to take a break. The interview script, attached to this document in Appendix A, allowed participants to answer a series of open-ended questions related to their PWI experience and their identity status. At the conclusion of the interview data were saved to a hard drive to be coded later for analysis and evaluation of the research questions.

As suggested by in-depth interviewing protocol for qualitative research studies using an information saturation model, data collection stopped interviews ceased to yield new information, which indicated that sufficient information saturation had been reached. During data analysis, it was necessary for some participants to be re-contacted for

clarification purposes in order to ensure accuracy in the transcription and to clarify intended meaning in the narrative. While it is not possible to capture every experience from every participant, analysis remained focused on the stated purpose of the study and efforts to ensure understanding about the participants stories allowed for the most accurately represented the participant experiences possible.

Member checks during this research were constant and continuous; three methods of member checks were used based on guidelines described by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen (1993). First member checks were used to finalize the data received during each interview; this involved researcher clarification by relaying interpretations of the narratives back to the participant for accuracy confirmation. Second, in each subsequent interview, data from previous interviews were used to verify researcher interpretations during and after the interview protocol to ensure that the interpretations were derived from other participants' responses. Finally, upon completing the data collection, informal conversation with participants originally listed for inclusion in this study were not actually interviewed due to reaching a point of saturation that provided confirmation of data interpretation. Being ethical by providing member checks allowed participants to be more in control and aware of the interpretations of data and how their voices are used in the final analysis and interpretations of data in this study. In addition, each participant was explicitly invited to stay involved during the research write-up process, to contact the researcher to ensure accurate interpretation of interview data, and being ethical in data analysis and interpretations. No participant contacted the researcher and thus all participants declined involvement in the study analysis and findings.

Data were originally coded and analyzed continuously in a constant comparative

method during the collection phase. The researcher transcribed the first five interviews in order to become familiar with and fully immersed in the data, which also enabled the visualization of idea development and growth during interviews. Professional transcription services were utilized for interviews six through 15 in order to obtain interview data that was ready to be coded and analyzed in a timely manner. Interviews were transcribed for content and were listened to and 'memoed' for contextual understanding. Final written analysis of this study also included a paid proofreader and editor to ensure professionalism in the final written product.

Analytic memos. Memoing was used during the data collection process to keep the researcher as close to the process as possible and to highlight and enhance the research perspective for future interviews. Memoing in this research study primarily played a role in the data collection phase rather than the data analysis phase. This process was specifically useful for reflection on not only the benefits of such a study but also thinking about the future, how such research results can be distributed to other audiences outside of academia, and how it can be used to empower others by making their voices matter. In a memo dated February 27, 2012 the researcher reflected on their personal connection to the conversations during the interviews:

> I started to think of just how much I would LOVE if everyone could hear these conversations I am having with these young men. Having these types of conversations in private do us less justice while in this preservation of confidentiality and privacy. In the spirit of giving back and creating a path or pattern for the next young life, these are conversations that should happen publicly, with valor and with praise. This is how we shape knowledge and society and the public sphere through creativity and consciousness.

> Beyond the personal reflections about how such research can be used fruitfully,

memoing also helped to develop follow-up interview questions that ultimately helped in the data analysis. For example, there was a moment where it became evident that there were turning points in student experiences that ultimately led to their graduation:

> I am finding that once students recognize that they can do this, it is then that a turning point, public or private, happens. And work ethic begins to be the thing that is reformed, not necessarily the person. That part comes as a consequence of this action. After a while and based on the involvement with others, you will most likely start to change. How can we think about this in terms of communities to say that changing the ways we do things may be useful to attacking the ignorance that plagues our communities?

Data Analysis Procedures and Coding

Creswell (2007) notes that computer-based analysis puts a machine between the researcher and the actual data, causing an uncomfortable distance between the two. Exercising an immersed researcher role, hand coding of the data was utilized for this study as computer coding does not allow for easy evaluation about the specific nuanced and complex meanings of nonverbal and non-text data such as verbal hesitations, short silences, and other paralinguistic cues which aided in transitioning from transcript to coded data for analysis. I paid particular attention to nuanced responses, which gave the data additional depth once the codes were applied.

Once transcribed, several coding methods were tested to find the best one for the current research project. Saldana (2009) states that coding often goes through several coding processes because rarely is the first cyclical act of coding perfect. The first coding process was manual open coding, consistent with grounded theory; ultimately grounded theory was not the best way to understand the data for many reasons. First, the number of codes and categories emerging through open coding of all data became convoluted,

difficult to interpret, and did not seem respond effectively to the research questions. Morse (2001) describes the limitations of classical grounded theory coding as including that the researcher can become mired in the abundance of data and codes when a study is void of a preconceived theoretical context to draw on for this task. The phenomenon investigated in this study is complex and embedded with intersectionalities across multiple identities including race, student identity status, and gender. Therefore, the original coding process produced many matrices of information, which became not only cumbersome but also counterproductive to answering the research questions. Taking the claims of Morse (2001) more literally, the coding direction was changed to use a multi-coding process , which better represented and produced useful outcomes of data interpretation.

Structural Coding	Simultaneous Coding- Based on CTI frames	Coded examples and illustrations of each CTI frame
Descriptive Coding		
Sub Coding (Where applicable)		

Table 1: Coding Process

The final coding procedures included a combination of structural coding used for organizing the data, descriptive coding used to understand what was being discussed, and subcoding which was used where applicable to further develop descriptive codes. A simultaneous coding method of a priori coding as described by Saldana (2012) and

derived from the theoretical framework of CTI also revealed specific examples from the data set that illustrated the constructs of the research questions. This coding process allowed for the pooling of data through various theoretical lenses in a specific order, to derive a richer description of research findings and outcomes.

The first step taken from the raw data was to view all responses as a pool of data regardless of which interview questions they answered. Using the data in this way, it was discovered that although interview questions were focused, responses to one question also produced responses and extended interpretations of responses to other interview questions and had relevancy to several research questions. For example, in Marvin's response to an interview question about any positive or negative moments he held significant during his persistent process, he said:

> I took four years to graduate. Overall, it was good and as years go by you fade out the bad stuff. Overall, it was good. [X] is a school of service. When I went for international affairs I had some really great professors.

Although this was a response to the interview question regarding significant moments during persistence, it also provided a context or follow up to the interview question regarding college choice. Marvin's response to that question was as follows.

> I wanted to go to [X] for as long as I can remember. I knew I wanted to be a lawyer then I realized how much lawyers had to work. I have always been interested in international affairs so I chose because [X] is one of the best in international affairs.

These two interview questions appeared unrelated during the interview but when evaluated through the lens of pooling the data, the responses could be related. One way to consider this data was to take this information and interpret it in terms of a relational identity. As CTI describes, relational identities are those related to dyadic communication

interaction. Therefore, in relation to RQ2 regarding identities relevant to the persistence

process, the interaction mentioned by Marvin about having great professors related to

having any kind of connection to faculty regarding college/university choice; it was

therefore considered in the interpretation phase that relational identities could be related

to openness to available resources to make those types of connections possible. The

ability to choose the preferred college was important, in contrast to data from athletes that

suggested they go through a different process of selecting a college and seemed to be less

about choice. These ideas lead to the consideration about what types of relational

interactions athletes experienced related to their own college selection process. Pooling

the data as a preliminary step to coding provided rich interpretations of the PWI

experience as the data had the potential to answer, in part, any and all research questions.

After pooling data to be coded, structural coding based on interview questions

was applied to facilitate analysis. Because each interview question had a specific goal,

structural codes were essentially categories of information which included/incorporated a

number of codes related to the overall category. The data yielded approximately 20

structural codes, which can also be considered categories and allows for the organization

of complex data. The main idea of each interview question was reduced to a short phrase

or related word and used as a first cycle code. For example, interview question number

one (listed on the Interview Question Script in Appendix A) asked, "Can you tell me

about the reasons why you initially wanted to attend college?" and was reduced to a

structural code of 'college reason' for coding purposes. This process allowed for the

development of a useful code to start the grouping process but also to organize the data.

As stated previously, maintaining the lens of pooling data, coded responses were given to

the interview question from which the code derived but also all instances of that code across the pooled data. The structural codes derived from the data were as follows:

Family Thoughts	Significant Moments	Race Issues	Group Involvement	Graduation Importance
Encouragement	Expectations	Parent Involvement	Persistence Motivation	Black Student
College Choice	Everyday Expression	Prove	Support	Black Graduate
College Reason	Black Visibility	Major Influence	Finish	Future Plans

Table 2: Structural Codes

Structural coding provided a specific way of organizing the abundance of data that covered an array of similar experiences. All examples of 'college reason' were grouped together then subjected to further descriptive coding to understand what those processes meant to the PWI experience. After structural coding, descriptive coding was used as described by Saldana (2009). In this process, data are scrutinized to find the topics associated with a passage from the transcript that includes desired data. It is important to note here that each structural code produces overlapping descriptive codes. For example, the structural codes of 'college choice' and 'college reason' both overlapped in the descriptive code of 'time'. However, they both also produced distinct descriptive codes of 'available resources' and 'identity status,' respectively. Descriptive codes derived across the data based on each structural code can be found in Table 3: Descriptive Codes.

Structural Code-for organizing	Descriptive Codes- What topics are being discussed?		
Family Thoughts	• Feelings of parents	• Definitions of family	• Time
Encouragement	• People • Perceptions	• Expectations • Support	• Time
College Choice	• Available resources • Time	• Distance • Location	• Perceived feelings of persistence
College Reason	• Status • Identity status	• Perception expectation	• Types of participation • Time
Significant Moments	• Type of significance • Issues • Interpersonal interactions	• Perceptions • Identity	• Time • Expectations
Expectations	• Outcomes • Support	• Feelings • Time	• Changes in Expectation • Outsider perceptions
Everyday Expression	• Adapting • Strategy • Perceptions	• Language • Outcome of actions • Blackness	• Expectations • Identity issues • Time
Black Visibility	• Quantity • Types of Black students	• Perception • Time	• Expectations
Race Issues	• Perceived issues • Actual issues	• Strategies used • Expectations	• Time
Parent Involvement	• Parent communication	• Time	• Expectations
Prove	• Value of Experience • Perceived value	• People • Time	• Identity
Major Role	• Certainty • Persistence	• group involvement	• Time
Group Involvement	• Activities and groups involvement	• Perception of groups	• Time
Persistence	• Influence	• Social learning and influence	• Time
Support	• Perceived Support • Sources of support (athletes/non-athletes).	• Purpose of support • Time	• Expectation
Finish	• Certainty	• Possible Hindrances	• Time
Graduation	• What to pay attention to-prescriptive • Cognizant-alertness	• Graduation influences	• Time

Black College Student	• Commitment levels • Referenced perceptions	• Level of importance • Time	• Value of Attendance
Black Graduate	• Degree Relations/ • Connections	• Time	
Future Plan	• Degree plan • Degree Power	• Degree Use	• Time

Table 3: Descriptive Codes

Simultaneous coding was used across all data and accounts for multiple meanings (Saldana, 2009) by using a priori codes derived from the theoretical framework of CTI. A simultaneous code is the application of two or more different codes to a single qualitative datum (Saldana, 2009, pg. 62). While the data had already been subjected to structural and descriptive coding method, it also was subjected to a simultaneous process of applying a priori codes to assess how the data discussed related specifically to identity. For example, the following coding process was applied to the 'Family Thoughts' code,. As shown in Table 4 some codes showed a connection to all four frames of identity through CTI while others only revealed a connection to three or fewer frames.

Family Thoughts		Black Visibility	
Personal	~Proud of self	Personal	N/A
Relational	~Parents glad to see me doing well ~Parents proud	Relational	N/A
Enacted	~Doing well in school (continuously)	Enacted	N/A
Communal	~Setting an example for other Black students	Communal	~Seeing few other Black students ~Hoping to see more Black students

Table 4: Simultaneous Coding

CTI states that identity occurs in four frames that include the personal, relational, enacted, and communal. According to CTI, when identities are being used there is a standpoint from which individuals communicate that are related to one of these frames. Examples for each CTI frame were displayed across the data in many instances. Personal identities are those we hold in our own favor. Despite what anyone else may think of us, self-perceptions are valued by the person they belong to in the personal frame of identity. In the area of 'family thoughts' participants' personal identities were ignited to the point that it made Black males aware that they were proud of themselves.

Relational and enacted identities work in tandem where the relational frame indicates one's role in a relational interaction and enactment indicates the actions carried out that signify the relational interaction. Willie stated the following when discussing whether he always knew he would graduate from the PWI he attended:

> I always knew I would finish because I told my mom I would finish. And if I tell a lie it is to a friend, but not to my mom. If I promise her something I am going to do it so I always knew I would go back and finish. I'll be finished in the summer time.

Willie's relational identity put him in a role in relation to his mother (and one that elevates the perception of the mother identity over the friend identity). His relational identity in this situation can be concluded as a son. Although he is speaking as a student that is not the identity that indicates that there is a relational interaction in this instance. His choice of using the words, "I am going to do it" are a part of his enacted identity since within the context of this research and in his follow-up statements he fulfilled the actions of his role by being "finished in the summer time." The way he fulfilled his role in the relational frame was by graduating signaling that this particular relational identity is one that was relevant and influential in the process of persisting.

Finally, the communal identity is one that is defined in terms of membership in a group. Particular to this research, many statements made by participants were in relation to a communal Black identity. In the example of the 'Black Visibility' code, it was shown that only the communal identity was relevant. Black males spoke about their hopes to see other Black students in class and around campus because they only saw a few. In these responses they did not strongly associate this hope to see other Black students in the communal frame to any other frame. For example, none of the study participants stated thoughts of lacking friendships due to only seeing a few other Black males. If this were the case, the relational frame of identity would be relevant to this code.

Another identity that emerged in this frame was college athlete (shortened to athlete throughout the results sections of this research) since to be on a college athletic team usually means you are a part of a membership group consisting of other members also called athletes. Essentially, the title is what joins you and indicates similarities for the group. It is also here that the complexity of identity can be understood due to the fact that any person can be situated in more than one frame at one time but also that a person can be deeply immersed in several identities falling under one frame. For example, as athletes discussed an athlete identity it is in relation to the team; however, that same athlete also has membership in the communal identity as student of the college or university itself, thus both identities are also sharing a communal frame with a Black cultural identity. Being situated heavily in one frame through several identities and/or making one identity action that falls in two or more frames uncomfortably causes a person to have to rank identities based on social needs.

During the coding process there were instances where this ranking occurs. An example of a statement indicating a hierarchy of identity needs came from Billy, who showed a ranking of identity during the persistence process as a student who stated, "The athlete's identity comes way before being Black." This indicates that Billy has described that within the context of the PWI there are times when the communal athlete identity is considered more important or relevant than the communal Black identity.

Overall, once a new cycle of coding using the previously discussed methods was utilized, it provided a more systematic way of analysis. The data began to lead to useful insights about Black male experiences at PWIs. As Saldana (2008) states, coding is not a science, it is an interpretive art and as such, the study data was coded in a way that made it manageable and productive in ways that made the data useful for answering the research questions.

The next chapter discusses the findings and each research question will address any complications encountered in the process of coding and presenting the results. These complexities also related to the data analysis methods as some of those impediments created a gray area illustrating the extent to which the data was able to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis and Results

Analysis of interview responses by study participants revealed a wide range of codes related to their identities of being sons, students and Black individuals. The analysis here will concentrate on their responses as participants in an undergraduate experience at predominantly White institutions to identify the processes of persistence relevant to academic expectations. Prior to discussing data analysis results in detail, three general observations of the data should be noted.

First, time periods during persistence were revealed to be a significantly relevant area and influenced the organization of the data. The data analysis pertaining to RQ1, asking about their expectations before, during and after persistence, revealed that expectations prior to persistence as well as whether these expectations were met or unmet during the experiences were considered an integral part of their persistence experience. The data also revealed the importance of the period just after college, as interviewees discussed how they might apply their persistence experience to future experiences. Therefore, the analysis will include a focus on the entire duration--before even entering the college setting, to how these expectations played out during persistence and also what Black males believed it promised for the future.

A second area that emerged as significant to data analysis was student type (athlete vs non-athlete), since eight of the fifteen participants were athletes. Although not all responses to the interview questions showed this key difference, a significant majority of them did and therefore, the analysis makes clear the differences between athlete and non athlete experience where applicable.

Finally, the analysis of the interview responses of these Black males--interacting within a micro-context of the PWI and the societal macro-context--revealed that the macro-contexts of the racialized U. S. society clearly play a role in how they communicated about their expectations of and experiences on the PWI campus.

RQ1: What are the expectations of Black male students during the periods related to before, during and after the PWI persistence process?

Five themes were identified in the answer to this question after the final phase in the stacked coding and reduction process was applied to data: specific outcomes, parent interaction, classroom interactions, support outlets and degree completion. All five of these themes are discussed in detail below. In reference to the discussed areas there were three common sub themes of expectations for specific outcomes: a) In many areas students had positive expectations including the expectation that the overall persistence process would be a positive experience; b) athletes had expectations for specific negative outcomes regarding social judgments (stereotyping, prejudice) based on their athlete status; 3)an overall expectation for both athletes and non-athletes for specific negative outcomes regarding race relations during persistence. Below I will expand on each of these three areas related to expectations for specific outcomes.

Expectations for Specific Types of Outcomes

Positive Outcomes. When asked specifically about their expectations relevant to the persistence experience, the students responded in terms of their expectations before, during or after the PWI experience. The data analysis revealed that for most, before arriving at the PWI the expectation was for college to be an experience leading to a

degree which would eventually lead to something that would be beneficial to their careers and life in general. Although athletes mostly stated that there was no desire to attend if sports was not an option, all Black males had expectations for attending college to produce positive outcomes.

> I knew that college would allow me a better lifestyle so I just wanted to get a degree, not only for the better benefit of me but just for my family because nobody's done it, yet.. - John

This expectation for college to be beneficial was related to an expected result of opportunities gained during persistence for personal and academic growth. Academic growth was illustrated by strength and power of obtaining the degree. Personal growth was not discussed by all participants or defined in detail. However, one illustration of personal growth came from Jake who made a connection between the potential strength derived from the experience and its effect on the body as a form of personal growth. Mental strength was viewed as a personal gain that could be used for and during this experience. Jake stated, " If your brain works better your body should work better. I was hoping that the more educated I got I would care about my physical. Mental-physical it's just all together." (This was particularly interesting when compared with narratives later discussed related to what the body and spirit endured and strategies related to dealing with issues of race and the mental strength it takes to knowingly resist the dominant culture and its stereotypes of Blacks during persistence). These expectations for positive growth were crucial points of maintaining persistence toward graduation at the PWI indicating that the PWI will come with difficulties but the terrain of the experience also strengthens one for the experience itself.

Pre-college perceptions acknowledged that there would be some level of difficulty in being a student. David states, "I was expecting it'd be super-hard". One possible explanation for the perceived level of difficulty could be from scripts provided on television or through media as a few of the Black males mentioned television as a way of learning about what happens on college campuses. Tommy said, "College from what you hear, you hear horror stories and how it can be for some students" referencing the fact that some students get off track during their time in college. David had a similar perception based on media sources. "I didn't really have expectations. I knew what was portrayed in movies." Despite these depictions Black males were still hopeful of the rewards that college attendance would provide and expected it to be positive when stating what they thought they could gain from the experience.

I wanted to be the most well rounded person that I could be; I want to be a productive citizen in life. -Marlan

Expectations for positive outcomes was also based on the opportunity to obtain a degree which was viewed as a tool for being able to provide a better opportunity for work and life. However, the process of actually getting to the persistence experience by choosing a college location came with some pre-college perceptions like those discussed above but did not affect the expectation that persistence would be a an experience with positive outcomes.

The main [reason I attended college] was pretty much to play basketball. I didn't really care too much about academia as far as being a professional as far as a doctor or a lawyer or something like that, but it was pretty much to play basketball. I know how to get to college to play basketball and then hopefully to get at least to go pro. - Shawn

Data showed that ways of making the final decision on school choice greatly differed between athletes and non-athletes. College location for Black athletes at a PWI was determined primarily by the possibility of playing athletics and mainly because that was the direction their scholarships took them in. For athletes there was no uncertainty expressed about whether they were making the right decision on which school to attend. That is, they expected that the persistence process would provide a platform for launching them to a career of professional sports after college; a secondary goal, and still a positive one, was to obtain a degree to fall back on.

The responses also seemed to show that athlete positive expectations for sports to provide a gateway to professional sports later changed to a point where they expected the same positive outcome for academics. Jake states that, "I didn't really realize that college was important until my junior year in college." This and similar responses indicated there was often a point of realization for athletes of when academics became equally as or more important than sports.

Although the data were not able to clearly show the point of realization for all athletes during their college days where their student identity became ranked higher and more important than their athlete identity, this expectation of academics for athletes developed during persistence and in contrast to their pre-college expectations. Some realized the changed in relation to an event of persistence.

> Well, I would say my first semester my freshman year, it was all about just football, football, football. Once I started taking classes and I seen myself exceling at it, my opinion actually swapped. It was more student and athlete, because the athletics came easy to me. The school was more of a challenge. When you get a challenge, that really motivates you and wants you to push harder. - Billy

On the other hand some athletes could identify an exact time (often also related to an event) when they changed their persistence goals. This point of realization also illustrated a point of convergence between athletes and non-athletes by showing eventually, for both groups, graduation or obtaining a degree became realistic goals.

> It wasn't until I actually got to college is where I got serious about getting the education. It kind of put a curveball into my sophomore year at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. We were all sitting up in the—it was like the lounge area called the Ball Room. We were all just talking about the realistic chances of what we have making it pro. We kinda came to grips with just that we needed to actually focus on our education more. I mean we were going to school and were still getting good grades, but it was like we were just going to school just so we could play basketball and not going to school so we can graduate and try to secure employment after college. That's when it really clicked. It was like basketball is a second thought and now it's just about school now. That's when it happened, like the end of my sophomore year in college. -Chris

As shown, the data revealed that athletes later refined their expectations for college to include positive expectations about earning a degree in order to develop other areas of life. Upon his realization that a degree was important Billy stated, "Having a degree, I thought the job field would be so much easier". Athletes began to specifically state that obtaining a degree would develop other areas of life indicated by its ability to provide stability to take care of family, develop physical stamina and endurance and an overall push to open more doors of opportunity. Becoming role models was even a goal of some of the Black males. This convergence of athlete and student identities made it evident that athletes were moving away from the idea that college was only for the purpose of playing a sport to the idea that college was a tool in which obtaining a degree would enhance their overall life status.

Basically, [obtaining a degree is for] securing a good job; being able to support my

family after I graduated. -Chris

 This realization that college itself was important is significant, because without it, the

athletes of this study could have faced the possibility of not graduating. Because they did

have this realization, it created a more pronounced expectation for the personal identity

and elevation of the student identity, which seems to be a key point of influence in all

Black males of this study making it to graduation. Once athletes viewed school as

important, they started to expect more out of themselves academically and saw

themselves as valuable contributors of knowledge to others as previously discussed by

Billy and Chris. In comparison to the narrative of Tony, a non-athlete, it can be seen how

athletes transitioned from an athlete to a more focused student and later shared the

narrative with non-athletes that the degree is to fulfill an expectation of better job and life

opportunities.

> When I first got to college, like I said, I just wanted to play basketball. I
> mean academics was kinda in the back. By the time I finished, it was like
> I was excited for school. I was ready to hit the real world ready to start
> going on interviews. I was doing mock interviews with my peers at my
> school. I was just ready to hit the ground and start running. - Chris

> I think that was like one of the main expectations [of getting a degree] was
> finding a job. Because I think society kinda plants in your head when you
> are in high school that you graduate high school you go to college, you go
> to grad school or you find a job. That's gonna start your career and your
> life then you start a family and it all falls into place. - Tony (non-athlete)

Specific Athlete Expectations to be Negatively Stereotyped During

Persistence. Athletes in particular, showed an expectation to be judged negatively by

other students and even faculty during persistence and both on and off campus--based on

their athlete status alone and sometimes just because they were Black. Some refer to the

student athlete label as an oxymoron that continuously reminds people of the inconsistency of being a student and being an athlete (Stone, Harrison, & Mottley, 2012). Athletes in this study understand this perception and although considered negative, seemed to not deter them from athletic participation. However, an acknowledgement of this judgment seemed to be an integral part of the persistence experience for athletes where identity work was to maintain and negotiate accepted identities.

> You really have something to prove because you don't wanna be that typical dumb athlete….My main thing was not being categorized as the dumb athlete. - Billy

> Before us, there wasn't a basketball team. There wasn't a Black presence on campus. I think all the stereotypes that the kids (students) had kinda went to us, because that was the first time ever seeing a majority Black team on campus. They had all these stereotypes. I think that's why it was tough for us. - Chris

Because they expected to be judged negatively for being athletes and sometimes specifically for being Black athletes, it seemed that there could have been a constant negotiation of these two identities during persistence. Interview data did not reveal exactly when this negotiation process arose for athletes, nor whether it was related to their shift from athlete focus to student focus. However, it did indicate that being an athlete created an unleveled playing field, so to speak, similar to being Black.

> At the same time, you don't look at us as academics or you don't think we're on
>
> the same level as you academically. - Chris

They explained the reasons for their expectations for negative stereotyping by stereotypical perceptions that athletes breezed through college, that they had people who did their work for them (e. g., an academic study team provided by the athletic

department) and/or that they had unlimited resources to help them succeed academically.

Athlete interviewees made clear that this was not the case.

> Probably, back in the day they had this issue [of athletes breezing by and others doing work for them]. Nowadays, campuses are cutting off on all that type of stuff. - Jake

> No, we're definitely, we have, not nobody doing your work for you, but I definitely had an academic team where I would have a tutor that was available to me, and an academic advisor. Also, days that I would miss class or couldn't make it whether traveling or not, there was always somebody to take notes for me. As far as me taking my own tests and doing the work, I did all my work. I would not dare to have somebody do my work for me. - David

Being stereotyped in this way, although expected, was unsettling for these particular

students and prompted strategies for negotiating the athlete identity and also trying to

change these stereotypes. In some cases coaches were aware of the stereotypes based on

physical appearance and athletes were told how to avoid them. Shawn says his coach

specifically said, "You guys need to dress, set yourself apart. Don't play to the

stereotypes." This was a suggestion for Shawn and other Black teammates to not wear

hats backwards and white T-shirts, which was a popular style of everyday dress at the

time for many urban Black males. For Shawn, however, he saw this particular style of

clothing as part of his culture and just something his peers did. This was a clear

illustration of navigating and negotiating between the athlete, Black, and even the student

identity. Shawn also indicated that the some stereotypes were based on language and a

perception that Black students would communication with and respond to slang.

> I think the simple fact that they know you are an athlete and Black, but they also will still stereotype you like I could be walking down to a class and then an Asian or somebody would say, "What's up?" and give me five and the same Asian kid I could see saying hi to his friend, and it's different. - Shawn

This identity work in the form of strategizing and negotiating seemed to form the essence

of the persistence experience for many of these Black male athletes. Overall,

expectations to be stereotyped negatively prompted athletes to interact in different ways

to not only try to negotiate perceived identities but also change the stereotype:

> Communication was everything. I even did research on my own about communication and how to talk. I found out that usually people talk in the same aspect that they are talked to. But at that point it was to keep my identity. I was Black. My identity was not tainted. But I wanted the perception of my identity to change. I didn't want to just be considered some black kid. - Willie

Due to athlete expectations for negative stereotyping, specific negotiations of identity

were a salient part of the process. The type of institution an athlete attended influenced

the way the student identity and athlete identity functioned and essentially changed the

frequency of those negotiations. The athlete interviewees explained that a school whose

athletic program is not well recognized or prestigious has fewer financial resources for

athletes. This can lead to misconceptions when it comes to larger athletic programs and

the resources they are capable of providing. Athletes stated that when the school was less

funded in the athletic area, athletes had to work harder to maintain both identities because

the resources, like tutoring and study hall, were not there to always assist athletes and

their time schedules.

> We weren't like a big organization to win a lot of medals and stuff. We competed in things like that but we were not winning any actual championships so I don't think the athletics-It was an experience more like a regular student [at my institution]. - Jake

So some athletes had to put in more effort at studying outside of the time commitment

of athletics because they were not provided an academic study team like athletes in other

larger programs. Overall, some athletes were judged based on the stereotype of being the

dumb jock because it was perceived they had people doing the work for them although it was really not the case. On the other hand, others athletes were judged on the same stereotype although much of their time was spent doing the opposite--*not* being the dumb jock and working harder as a student to maintain athletic eligibility.

Negative Expectations Regarding Race Relations During Persistence

During persistence it was expected, by both athletes and non-athletes, that issues regarding race would be negative. As stated by Black male students in this study, being Black on a PWI campus is an anomaly. It was not clear if students came to this realization before or during persistence but the outcomes of such a realization manifested during persistence. Athletes and non-athletes alike stressed the fact that being Black on a PWI campus was a rarity. From the athlete perspective, there were very few Black students on campus and those who were there were most likely athletes. Chris, an athlete, states that, "It was weird that somebody Black was in school, just in school. We had foreign exchange students, though. We would have some students like from Ethiopia that were Black. But aside from [that] just, other athletes." It seemed that the lack of Black visibility led to an awareness of the campus climate which stood as a great point of comparison between the actual number of Black students compared to others in attendance. In Willie's athletic perspective, other Black people seen on campus were only there for athletics. "Only Black people there were athletes. The crazy thing was we had some Africans that came here and they ran track. Not one Black person was here because they just wanted to be here." This was not the sentiment of all participants, or even all athletes, but the awareness of small numbers of Blacks was certainly expressed by both athletes and non-athletes.

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If you see 25 [Black] guys at one time it may seem like a lot but it's a million people there that are White. - Willie

I was in school of foreign service which was a difficult school to get into. In a class of 1500 there probably five black students in [my particular] program. - John

Outside of practice it was real rare. I would have to drive at least 45 minutes outside of town to see others. In the town all the Blacks were athletes! - Bernard

This comparison seemed to create a higher awareness and higher expectancy for negative outcomes related to race, since the ratio of Blacks to other races, particularly Whites, was so low. Jake talked about a significant time in his reflection, referencing the constant 'issue' that being Black posed to him in everyday life at the PWI. "Negatively, just the environment. Being a Black male." Expectation for negative issues related to race mirrors the landscape of the given macro-context of a PWI and a racialized society in general, which includes expectations of being looked at as different, expected racism and being judged as academically and socially inferior. Many offered suggestions for how to get through those situations, including Jerry.

Don't fall into it. Pretty much. Don't overreact because you are going to face a situation like that again in my opinion because I think racism still exists. It's how you react at the end of the day. Are you gonna react and try to cause a scene or are you gonna be an adult about it and be mature and just walk away and say that person was ignorant? - Jerry

Participant responses about expected racial issues at a PWI revealed a strong subtheme of inevitability and was also seen as a distinct part of the persistence process. "Yeah, it had to be [because of race]. Sometimes I felt a little bit of racism. You just keep going." - Billy

The only thing negative was just this past week or so since it is Black History Month the [Black Student Group] decided to place out yard signs in honor of the month that would pay homage to those African Americans

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who were inventors and paved the way for a lot of things and give a little history about them by putting out the signs around campus. Not even 24 hours later those yard signs were removed, some people ripped them, defaced some, stepped on them and moved them out the way. I felt like it was because they were about Black history and they felt that it shouldn't be on campus. I think that was the most bad experience just because I feel like you can't stop the racism or stereotypes or discrimination because it is going to happen regardless. - Vance

This subtheme of inevitability that came from an expectation for race issues was also confirmed by the fact that when students were confronted with racist incidents they had ready-made responses (which will be discussed later), responding in ways to maintain their given identities. My conclusion was that this approach also came from rules learned from the macro-context, the larger society.

There was an incident homecoming weekend. A White family was just sitting out, we were walking by and they just went off like, "Fuck you niggers. You need to go back where the fuck you're from". Me, I really didn't care. But my other teammates took offense to it. They actually kicked their ass. I'm not gonna get involved because it is not that serious. It's just a word. It's not affecting me. Their level of ignorance. Y'all gotta realize we're in an all-White town. You kick they ass they're gonna come single y'all out. So it would be pointless. So I just stayed away because I know my big picture. I wasn't gonna let nothing or no one distract me or knock me off course. - Bernard

On the court, we would go to schools that we played against and you would always hear your teammates come back to the bench and say, "He called me a Nigger, he called me the N word," and that the crowd is saying it. We got that a lot. We were a majority African-American team, one of the only teams in the league that was majority African-American, so every road game that's what we got. - Chris

Black males did make references to general ideas of expected racism, which were often followed by the realization that this is how things are generally and at a PWI. Billy states, "At the end of the day, I just had to adapt to the situation." This aligns with the descriptions of CRT to identify the influence of racialized external macro-context of society and its connection to the microcosm of the PWI. It was also implied, and in some

cases explicitly stated, that the aggressor in these situations were White people and not

people of other any other race, further confirming the common black-white binary nature

of race relations in America.

> Yeah, [the racism] was disappointing but I've come to realize that it's almost expected. I'm never shocked anymore. I'm not shocked by anything. People are sheltered, people are going to keep their ideas and no matter how much I want them to change they may not change. That's up to them. Yeah, I'm just not shocked at all. - John

Overall, what is interesting in the data analysis concerning these young men's views of

perceived and actual racism and their expectations for it were their understanding of the

frequency of these types of happenings. They did not believe these were isolated cases,

but indicated that it was *expected* that racial issues would happen, as a part of African

American daily life as characterized by CRT--whether on the college campus or any

other context.

> I can say that probably at least 75 percent of Black students here on campus have experienced some type of racism. It's— I'm not shocked anymore so I would just say it's something that every student there or every student at a predominantly White institution that's—they're going to have to experience it in some way, shape or form. Even when you least expect it. I was in my dorm sophomore year during April and somebody walked past the dorm—my window was open—and he said, "I wonder how many niggers are in Miller?" Miller is the dorm name. Of course that wasn't a direct interaction but I heard it and that was racism, so— - it goes on when you least expect it. - John

Expectations About Parent Interaction During Persistence

As children of parents who did not attend or complete college, the interview

responses showed that the Black males had minimal expectations of their parents during

the persistence process. Parents and guardians were expected to stay in contact and call

to check on the well-being of the students. The expectation was further defined in terms

of what was expected from this contact. As one participant put it, he would 'shoot the

breeze' with his parents and discuss an array of topics which may or may not be related

to the persistence process. However, due to the lack of college experience it was also

expected that conversations would not cover academics. If the subject of academics did

come up during conversation they would focus on general questions of grades and how

the students were doing in class.

They were never concerned academically, but they always was checking on me and

making sure I was in good spirits and making sure I was good. - David

It was clear that the lack of experience dictated which topics could be talked about

with parents during the persistence process. For example, Marvin described how his

parents' lack of higher education limited their ability to ask more detailed questions and

led to the expectation for only basic communication.

More of just conversations of checking up on you. They never went
through the process so they didn't know what to ask. I felt that they
couldn't relate. If there was any kind of college related experience they
didn't have that background. I didn't ask. - Marvin

Expectations About Classroom Interactions During Persistence

Similar to the perceptions of low visibility of Black students on campus, the

expectation for the classroom mirrored this perception. Black said they expected that in

classroom settings Black visibility would be low due to the low number on campus

overall. Times when Black males would see another Black student were mostly when the

interaction was planned or in an African American studies course. This expectation was

realized over time in the duration of persistence and they went on to expect to see even

fewer, if any at all in classes related to their majors.

Outside of African American [department] classes I would almost say never. Only because it was such a small [Black] community. In that community everyone had different agenda, interests and there's a bunch of classes you can take. Unless it was one of the general classes none of which I took because they were not in my field (math and science), I didn't see too many. - Teddy

Given that I'm a [less impacted] major like very, very few. Actually, I'm graduating this semester as the only Black male. My department, both in those 13 classes that I had to take for the major, I would say maybe at max there were five of us in a class, maybe. I can remember a class where there were only three of us. I'm pretty sure there was a class when there were only two of us. There were very, very few. - John

The lack of Black faces reminds Black males that they are in a small community of people who must rely on each other for support. It was expected not to see faces of color, specifically African American faces, in positions of leadership as well. So when such achievement happened, it made accomplishments even more praiseworthy.

When I joined the USG becoming a senator for the School of Letters and Sciences. That's one of the things that stood out because you don't see a lot of African Americans in power. Not in those high leadership positions so it was neat to see myself up there. [It was me] and two other individuals who were African American because it was predominantly Whites in those positions. - Vance

However, in this area of expectations, the data seem to show the strength of the impact of others' (whites) stereotypes and their influence on these black students identity. That is, these black student accounts seem to indicate that the Black identity supersedes just about any identity, as this is the (sole) identity on which others (whites) judge them. That is, the superseding Black identity seemed to be fueled by outsider perceptions in and out of the classroom, perceptions that Black males were less valuable in the classroom in terms of being able to help others academically, and that they could only achieve lower scores and lower grades than others

The expectations concerning classroom issues and being viewed as academically inferior seemed to lead to a strong awareness of the effort needed to change those views. Tommy later summed up the sentiment and academic efforts of many of the Black males to not only change stereotypes and perceptions but to also represent the change itself.

> I just feel there has to be something that represents that change, that transformation. And education is the best way to show that change because it represents opportunity. And if we are able to achieve that goal and show that we have made this change you don't have to convince the public that we are doing better. But for any group that is going through a change, there has to be a way to show this and for me I felt that I wanted to be a part of that. - Tommy

Expectations About Degree Completion

The analysis revealed that the Black males responded with an overwhelming certainty of graduation success during persistence when asked if there was a time when they thought they would not complete the degree. This indicated a high expectation of the self as they indicated they heavily relied on themselves as their own greatest means of support once they committed to being students. For athletes, this commitment seemed to come later in the persistence process than for the non-athletes. Despite this difference, once they each committed to their student identity, graduation became a goal. This suggests that a strong and confident goal can aid Black males to getting to graduation. Ultimately, all respondents said they knew they would finish but also, realistically, understood the challenges and hurdles that would arise during the process.

> No, there wasn't a time where I didn't think I wouldn't complete my degree. It was a time that I knew was gonna be tough. - Chris

> I knew I was going to finish. I knew I was gonna graduate. Not that I knew. That was a goal. That's what I was there for. - Teddy

> Pretty much what I want to do I know I need a college degree. There was never in my mind one time just to drop out because I wasn't doing too well. - Jerry

So it seems that these males have a high regard for their education, even the athletes, after the early period of not being interested in academics. Perhaps this is not surprising, considering that these participants were selected for the study because they had succeeded. What is interesting here is that for a few students where there may have been issues that could have prevented their persistence and resulted in their wanting to quit, it was not viewed as an obstacle that could not be tackled, because they *expected* to graduate.

Obstacles that Black males dealt with that could have potentially deterred them from graduation included financial issues, campus issues and classroom issues. However, participants found ways to navigate these issues and kept the goal of graduation at the forefront of their experience. Financial issues were more of a concern for non-athletes than athletes. Tommy stated that his low points during persistence came from money related matters. However, based on the outcomes, Tommy sums up the experience as an important one worthy of the financial commitment. "No matter how much money I spent, it was definitely worth it. Very important." A few students even spoke of having to leave for a period but ultimately came back to finish the persistence process and graduate.

> This road, although it has been very bumpy, there was a light, an ending to it. Also the time I had to leave school for a while because I ran out of money. I went back home for a semester, and I realized that I needed to get a degree 'cuz I can't work a dead end job…I realized what my life would have been without it. - Marlan

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Situations where classroom, campus or academic situations posed the potential to deter Black males from graduation were also not strong enough to deter the goal oriented Black student. Willie navigated a classroom issue by relying on the support of his mother to remind him of his overall goal when confronted with a classroom situation he felt to be racist and/or disrespectful.

> After class was over [this situation] kinda hurt me a little bit because for the first time in my life I had to make a name for myself. I called my mom to tell her im comin' home because this is gonna be a disrespectful or racist situation. Maybe racist or disrespect. My mom said you are not coming home. You stay there and get your head right and make a name for yourself. I turned back around I tried to prove him wrong more than proving myself right and then by the end of the semester not only we had a final and I got an A but I had like a low C in the class struggling the whole time so I got an A. – Willie

This situation and those described earlier where students experienced racism and prejudice could have had strong potential to deter students from persisting and ultimately graduating. However, these students found ways to continue the persistence process. Jake sums it up by saying, "I know my big picture. I wasn't gonna let nothing or no one distract me or knock me off course." Billy sums up the effort when such issues arise stating, "At the end of the day, I just had to adapt to the situation. You just keep going."

Black males students seemed to view these issues as turning points, a realization or a moment of providing ammunition to keep going and further solidifying their resolve to persist to graduation. Furthermore, attaching the goal of finishing to family, community or self seemed to be motivation that held each accountable. Reasons attached to finishing included promises made to parents, feelings of having a role model status once finished which would reflect on the community or the most recognized was just a personal commitment that had no level of compromise in being fulfilled.

> I always knew I would finish because I told my mom I would finish.
> And if I tell a lie it is to a friend not to my mom. - Willie

> I needed to finish for me, my nieces and nephews and my parents and
> tell them it's not too late and you can do it. - Vance

These expressions of strong bonds and commitments to the expectation for parents to be involved despite their lack of college level education, really speak to the communication and motivation to attend college that come from the familial relationships of these Black males.

This answer to this first research question reveals some very clear and important points related to the expectations of Black male students during the persistence process. The data show that they have expectations for the periods before, during and after persistence. Before the persistence process they expected to have minimal involvement from parents due to their lack of attending college themselves. During the persistence process Black males expected to experience racial issues and considered it to be an inevitable occurrence. They also expected that race will be a reason for the way in which their academic ability will be perceived during the PWI process. Despite this negative expectation, all Black males expected to graduate after the persistence process no matter what it took. Specific instances that had potential to deter Black males from graduation included negative issues experienced on campus and in the classroom as well as financial issues. Despite the negative issues a major outcome was the fact that Black males expected to graduate. This shows that Black males, when they have a clear goal, are able to navigate around the negative expectations, especially those concerning race.

RQ2: According to Black male students, which identities were relevant to the persistence experience?

Identity is a multipart construct; individuals will have more than one identity and each will "provide expectations for behavior and motivate individual's behavior" (Gudykunst, 2002, p. 191). One highlight of identity includes the reciprocal communicative relationship between the owner of identity and the society, communities, groups and people they may interact with. As Black males interact on the PWI campus they are cultivating experiences that are not in isolation of the context in which they occur. The characteristics of these contexts and the people within these contexts matter in their process of identity negotiation. The aim of this research question was to better understand the salience of identities experienced and expressed by Black males at PWIs, which contributed to the goal of graduating.

For a thorough understanding of these students' identities, CTI was useful in conceptualizing identity as multilayered and emergent (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003) in the persistence process for Black males. CTI also allows for understanding the potential existence of contradiction of identity experience in the process of persistence. Four layers or frames of identity are utilized in this process that help to describe the relation of the identity to the individual as well as to the external world as in the PWI. The four frames (personal, enacted, relational and communal) provided a way to understand which layers were most important to the persistence process. Knowing the other participants who play a role in the development and execution of certain identities lends an understanding of the need for and strategies for strengthening those identities and relationships that play a significant role in getting Black males to graduation. The data were explained according to the frames of identity.

The four frames of CTI explain identity in relation to the persons and environments it is co-shared and co-created with. In the personal frame, identity is the identity that an individual creates for himself despite any influence of the external environment. For the next three frames, identity is specifically created through interactions with the others. In the relational frame, identity is created in connection to the interpersonal relationship one has with another individual. For example, in a familial relationship, Black males can claim the identity of 'son' only because they are acknowledging and claiming a role in a relationship between parent and child. In the enacted frame, identity is shown through action. So extending the relational definition, a 'son' enacts behaviors consistent with what he thinks a son should do. The enacted frame is consistent with enacted behaviors based on the relational frame. Finally, the communal identity is one that is claimed due to the relationship one has with a group. Claiming a group membership is almost the 'permission' one has to claim an identity in the communal frame. For Black males who self-identify as Black and adopt the norms of that group, then Black identity becomes a communal identity showing similarities to others who claim this identity.

Before presenting an analysis of the relevant data, it should be noted that the most significant findings for this research question was the complexity of the analysis. That said, as mentioned in the previous section, the data analysis seem to reveal that, for these respondents the Black identity supersedes how they are perceived and how they act out identities based on those perceptions. At the end of the initial phase of data analysis it was found that the generated codes and categories were very complex and convoluted for the following reasons. Viewing identity through the lens of CTI reveals a complex

matrix of possibilities and behaviors based on each salient identity (Black, male, student, athlete/non-athlete) at any given time. For example, in one context a Black identity could be communal or both personal and communal. Specifically, there are eleven possible identity combinations involving the four frames of CTI (i.e., six combinations between any two frames, four between any three frames and one among all four).

While each participant in this sample has a Black identity, he can have four layers of that identity (personal, enacted, relational, or communal) that are being navigated/negotiated at any given time. The other identities (student, athlete or male), provide the same number of potential interactions as the Black identity. Further complication arises when dealing with the potential for four separate identities overlapping and/or residing in each of the four frames, e.g. student identity in the personal frame, Black in the relational frame and so on. However, the analysis of the participant responses seemed to indicate that to the students, a Black identity was superordinate and contextualizes the existence and negotiation of other identities. So although being Black, and a student, and male, can be looked at separately, or even related to each of the levels of CTI simultaneously, according to Orbe's co-cultural theory, it is not possible to consider the latter two identities without understanding the treatment of the Black man in America which contextualizes the actual experiences of being a student and male, a Black male, and Black student. This explication and convolution of identity is supported by the frames of CTI which state that identities are multiple and overlapping. This research is but one way of looking at many intersectional ties between and among gendered and racial identities in specific contexts namely, the PWI context. Going further into the analysis phase, the identities that seemed most

relevant to the persistence process were Black, student (also read as non-athlete), athlete and male.

All three of the main identities of this research (Black, male, student) were under investigation. However, beyond these labels, the data provided description and understanding about what these identities truly mean in the PWI context and what the context means to these identities. The Black, student, and male identities are primary to this research and any other identity that is discussed or alluded to will be considered secondary identities in the research. This is not, however, negating that in a real world context that these experiences reflect a secondary identity in true life.

Four areas for each identity were useful to understanding identity in relation to the four frames of CTI which were *salience, centrality, intensity and changeability*. So for each identity I will discuss Black males experience in relations to these four identity dimensions.   For example, a few of the Black males interviewed discussed changing the visual and audible intensity of being Black to satisfy his student identity or to manage perceptions of his Black identity. The analysis considered such identity work to be a persistence strategy and the salience of the frames of CTI for interactions also applied to the analysis where applicable. Very few of the data points to specific issues with being a male so there will not be a specific, in depth discussion of maleness in terms of a clearly salient identity related to the CTI frames. This will, however, be a part of the overall discussion which coincides with the aforementioned superseding Black identity in which being a male adds another layer of cultural understanding in comparison to females. These experiences are different from Black females and also non-Blacks of both female and male gender. Further analyses determined the male identity to be an implied identity

where the behaviors displayed are those that follow acceptable forms of behavior for not males, but Black males as deemed by this group of Black males.

The frames of CTIs served as simultaneous codes (Saldana, 2009) used in connection with structural codes and functioned in a manner consistent with a priori codes. The discussion in this section will follow the order of the interview questions, as this order begins to tell the chronological story of these interviewees' experiences. While there may be some overlap in material with the previous research question, data analysis presented here specifically discusses and illustrates how PWI interactions for Black males are relevant to the four frames of identity.

The data showed how, based on which identity was salient for any given situation, they communicate according to the rules and norms of that identity. For example, as Black males discussed expectations (related to the previous research question), the identity from which they communicate is revealed and helps us understand when and how they employ their athlete and/or student identities and why each is applicable to the persistence process. Their responses also revealed if there is a hierarchy of identity needs that is beneficial to a successful persistence process.

It should be noted that although the actual experience for Black males was on the PWI campus, that experience is also contextualized by interactions prior to arriving at the university. Also, the actual experience leads to an orientation to the future as the purpose of getting a degree and attending college is to use it as a step to a career or further schooling. The first set of interview questions addressed the period and interaction before the actual PWI experience. The second set addressed the period during the actual

persistence experience on campus. The last set of questions address the process of graduating and plans for after graduation.

Before: Preparation and Planning

Family Thoughts and Parent Involvement. Family thoughts was a structural code describing the perceptions that family, mostly parents, had of the persistence experience, Although parents did not attend and/or graduate, most of the students reported that the parents always communicated the value of education and going to college to their children.

> I was raised by my dad, and he was very proud of me. That's all he used to preach was, "You need to go college." He didn't go to college. I was a first-generation person in my family to go to college. My brothers didn't go to college. Everybody was kinda rooting for me to go to college and graduate and get my degree. – Chris

 The specific feelings of parents were always reported as being on the positive side with responses like "cool", "excitement" and "happiness" which showed early instances of support for the experience. The data suggest that family plays a large role in how students view education. The responses for this interview question were related to the personal, relational and communal frames of CTI in the following ways.

In the personal frame Black males expressed a sense of pride in themselves in being the first one to attend college. "I would be the first person in my immediate family to go to college. My mom and dad couldn't go to college. I am the oldest of 7 so I wanted to set an example." This shows how being the one to set the example was a way of having pride in the potential of the experience. In the relational frame all students showed at least one instance of positive family or parent support which aided in the decision making process during persistence. A strong commitment to that parent-child

relationship led to decisions like knowing graduating was important because of the promise made to parents.   This interaction with parents is illustrates the relational identity signaling their identities as sons making commitments to parents. Going one step further, the behaviors elicited due to this relational commitment displays the enacted identity. In this case, successfully persisting:

> They were happy. But even though I went, it wasn't like I would speak to them on a daily basis. They would call, checkup, see how I was doing. So it was just something I got used to. I blocked it out. When they didn't call, It really didn't matter to me if they did… It really didn't matter because this was something I was striving for myself. So I accomplished that goal so I was proud of myself. – Bernard

> They [parents] thought it was an excellent idea because somebody went. You have to make it and be strong enough to make it back to tell the story since they never been. And then its' not that close to just drive out so it was like every time I come back they wanted to hear the stories good or bad. Because they never experienced it. - Willie

In the relational identities are those identities that exist due to the relationship of the participants. On the relational level, as parents were able to express the benefits of going to college on a general level, Black males were able to understand how their actions in school would make their parents proud and be perceived as doing something positive. This would be an indication of fulfilling the expectations of each other as sons to parents making it a relational interaction. It was also recognized as a personal rite of passage and recognizes the salience and centrality of the personal identity even in this relational stage.

Finally, on the communal level, Black males thought this experience to be one that set the tone for others who came after them in the Black community and in their own families. This was an early instance during the interview process of showing how the

Black identity was something these participants held as a possession and membership within the group was important. It also showed that as a son, their connection to their families was communal. As Black students persisted, they held such associations close to them as motivations toward graduation.

> I'm a football player, and they [parents] love football, so they definitely was excited about that. Two, that I was going to college and stepping into being a young man and making that transition, and sort of setting the tone for my little cousins and my little nieces and nephews and stuff. – David

These Black males made very clear that they took the role of being the first to go to college (and graduate) seriously and assumed that they had to succeed in this endeavor. They took pride in being able to come back and use this experience of persisting as an opportunity to relate this experience and their achievement to their family and others as a form of motivation. They essentially were becoming authority figures in their family and communities because of their experience of attending college which shows the full cycle of later being able to project college values to others, as their parents had done for them.

> More so to me, I just, I really hope and plan it's just inspiring. I work with kids all the time, and especially kids in my city, and my whole method is, if I can do it, you can do it. I'm from the same streets these kids is from. I done been in the same little shoot-out. I done grew up in the same little areas like, facing the same situations, enticed by the same situations. - David

It was interesting that none of the males stated an explicit push from parents to actually graduate. Rather, the push and success was the value in attending. This certainly could have been due to the fact that the parents had not attended so the victory was seen in just attending, with an inherent assumption that graduation is inevitable. The data does not confirm whether this was the case but it does confirm that motivation and support available was mostly for attending college, not specifically to graduate. According to

Keels (2013) 83% of all Black students attend PWIs. However, Black males are significantly less likely to graduate than their female counterparts. This is problematic and needs to be key areas of focus in the process of helping black males define specific goals for the persistence process beyond just attendance.

Outside Encouragement and Influence to Attend. When asked if there were other people who encouraged them to attend college, participants mentioned various people including coaches (for athletes), to friends, to advisors. The essence of responses to this interview question illustrated the relational frame of identity and denotes they type of support the Black males expected and actually did receive. For athletes, coaches played a role in encouraging athletes to attend college but did not necessarily stress the academic aspect of college. It was expected that these sources of encouragement only went so far as their jobs required of them.

As I listened, I could even hear a bit of uncertainty in their voices as to who, aside from parents, were the real people who encouraged them to attend college. However, it seemed that based on responses, friends had more of a strong push to encourage college enrollment. Black males tended to use each other's attendance and participation as a form of motivation.

> The couple friends I had, that's just us. We grew up in poverty. None of our parents went to college so it was a personal goal. We pushed each other. They were my motivation we just pushed each other. – Bernard
>
> Not necessarily teachers. Maybe a little peer pressure. But I would call it good peer pressure. You see all your friends doing well and applying to college so you want to kind of keep up. So I would say if anything else, it was the peers. That kind of also helped to motivate me to go to school. - Teddy

So on the communal level as well as the relational level of identity when in the student

role, Black males act as members of a larger group. This was interesting because those

considered to be authority figures (teachers, counselors, etc.) , who might be expected to

encourage college attendance, had shown little effort, as reported by participants, to

encourage college attendance and when they did receive encouragement from these

authorities it was perceived by the students as 'they're just doing their job' without any

real care. For athletes specifically, the encouragement had to do with opportunities to

continue playing sports, not academics.

In sum, what was most profound about this finding was that only a few students

mentioned authority figures as being wholly encouraging. The most encouragement to

attend college came from friends and peers. Further explication of these findings will be

discussed in the next research question regarding support.

Reasons for Attendance and College Choice. The personal and enacted frames

seemed to be important to decisions of college choice. In the area of college choice there

was a clear difference in athlete and non-athlete responses. Athletes tended to choose a

college, and essentially the location, based on scholarship availability, sports as a tool to

get to something greater that allowed them to build on their personal identities that would

play a role in their future. It also confirms the previous mention of the student identity as

secondary to being an athlete but also the fact that the personal identity is very important

at this stage without much influence from the relational frame.

> Everything I do is for basketball. If I didn't play basketball my parents
> couldn't pay for college. I used it as a tool to get to college. Used that to
> get my degree. - Bernard

Athletes reported that often the scholarship offers were from schools located in a rural area or institutions that were less desirable; however the availability of a scholarship made the location desirable compared to not attending at all. They also noted that attending PWIs, including those in non-rural areas, included the expectation of potential racism one would experience in these locations, as discussed in the previous section.

Analysis revealed that participants had two rather extreme choices in location when choosing their college: far (as in out of state) or near (in state or local). This was addressed by both athletes and non- athletes. The 'farther' choices are rationalized by athletes as desirable due to scholarship offers and the lack of alternatives. The nearer option is justified by non-athletes with uncertainty in the personal frame as participants understood that as first-generation college students they would need some support and wanted to be closer to family. This indicates a change in how the identity enactment plays out for both athletes and non-athletes. For non-athletes, it is particularly interesting since it was already understood that because parents had not attended they had little experience.

> I didn't apply to the HBCU because I had it in the back of my mind but it was the feeling of being away from family and I don't know what I'm doing. I'm the first one to go to the university so I don't have people telling me where to go. I was finding out everything for myself but in reality I was like I need to go somewhere that is here so I can be close to home because I don't know what is going on. – Vance

A clear understanding was shown that there is no 'hand-holding' in college, so the better option was to have support around for the potentially uncertain times. This showed that in the enacted frame of identity a student who shows himself to need support is directly connected to the relational frame of identity, connections to the people who can provide support. This was also sometimes related to the overall communal level of identity as Black males acknowledged being a part of families and communities and needing support

from them. Ultimately, choices to attend were about making personal choices, an indication of what one feels capable of in the personal frame, and committing to them.

> Once again we are searching and trying to find. As far as the retention and the graduation rate, it's all subjective. It's the person. The outgoing person will reach out and seek help. No one holds your hand. Are you gonna reach out and seek help or are you gonna sink? – Teddy

Consequently, when asked why they wanted to attend college, athletes responded that it was a way to develop the personal self by being very conscious of being the first one to attend college despite feelings of uncertainty. What became interesting with this response was that athletes' decisions to attend came first as an opportunity to play sports, then to be a student or academic. In many cases the athlete participants did not acknowledge the student identity. Athletes tended to take on the athlete identity as a primary one in the college context. For non-athletes, the personal frame of identity was also evident, seen in the responses giving other reasons, like wanting a change in life status for the better, expressing the belief that college would buy them out of the struggles their parents endured because they hadn't attended college.. We will later see how this perception is challenged or confirmed in the period after graduation.

During: Persistence

Expectations and Significant Moments. In connection to the expectations each participant had for the degree before actually obtaining it, the overwhelming response remained in the personal frame for purposes of personal growth despite any 'horror' stories or negative depictions they may have heard. Coincidentally, very few mentioned discomfort or even culture shock. Any culture shock mentioned came from the experiences and perceptions of 'others', read Whites, about their interactions with a Black person.

I noticed I was the only African American in the class. During his introduction speech to everyone he leaned over almost to look me dead in my face and said some of you in here don't have enough educational experience to handle what I am doing because of where you come from. I'm sure they didn't prepare you for this monster. – Willie

Also, a few mentioned (later) that the reason for getting a degree was for helping others, describing how obtaining a degree connects them to others in the community as well as strengthening and redefining their interpersonal relationships, revealing identity work on the relational and communal levels.

In regards to personal growth Black males saw the degree as a tool toward better career opportunities, leading to positive life change. As will be mentioned later, the actual obtaining of the degree changed the disposition from one of a simple experience toward a rite of passage, to a level of excitement for finishing. In all cases, the degree had clear purposes including something to fall back on when sporting was over. The fact that there was such a clear acknowledgement of the relevance to the personal frame makes it important to understand that although encouragement came from friends and parents specifically, the ultimate decision to go to college and graduate rests with the Black male, thus the personal frame. It also indicated it is a deliberate decision to go to college for their own future endeavors. When asked if any of their expectations had changed over time, the only clear change was the importance of obtaining a degree, especially for athletes.

When asked if there were significant moments during persistence, all responses were relevant to each of the levels of identity as conceptualized by CTI. The data analysis revealed two categories: negative moments and positive moments. When asked

about significant marks of the PWI experience, responses heavily rested on factors

associated with the Black identity and ranged from negative to positive. Those related to

positivity and associated with the communal Black identity include achievements which

ultimately reflected the pride in their Black identities as a representation to the

community.

> It was an advertising team that they brought me-made me a part of. I was
> supposed to submit a resume-I didn't. They just kind of recruited me to be
> a part of the team as the only Black person in like 4 years on the team you
> know in Idaho? It was a regional, national competition. And that was one
> of the biggest things that happened. I won best male presenter 2007 class
> and that was the biggest academic thing that happened. – Jake

> When I joined the USG, becoming a senator for the School of Letters and
> Sciences. That's one of the things that stood out because you don't see a
> lot of African Americans in power put in those high leadership positions
> so it was neat to see myself up there. There were two other individuals
> who also were African American because it was predominantly Whites in
> those positions. – Vance

The analysis of responses revealed that many of the good moments that happened for

these students and that turned out to be the most memorable were ones associated with a

(Black) group identity and had indications that also relate it to the personal frame as

being proud to be the holder of that position.

The moments reported as bad or negative experiences by Black males were,

however, also associated with the communal Black identity and involved racism and

discrimination. Billy discussed the difficulty in doing everyday tasks such as going to the

store. He jokingly stated, "I don't know if the [skin] color was a little too bright for 'em

or what, but they just had a staring problem or something". Negative experiences were

also characterized by academic failure in the personal frame, sometimes attributed to

experiences with racial issues. As noted earlier, racist experiences reported by athletes

tended to be more blatant and overt. For athletes, this finding was particularly interesting due to the overlap in stereotype of not only athletes but also of Blacks to be less educated or perceived as 'dumb'. Marlan summed up this racial stereotyping as:

> The only thing they saw of you was what they saw on the news or something like this. So they felt that you were a thug or thought you were gonna flip out. They didn't think you were that intelligent or you were gonna make—or if you were intelligent, you weren't gonna make the best choices.

Overall, analysis of the responses showed a consciousness of how problematic the Black identity can be for White individuals. This applied for athletes and non-athletes and indicated a connection to the communal frame of identity which, although participants showed pride in membership in the personal frame, on the relational and enacted levels, it caused students to respond in ways that would support the communal frame of the student identity. Specifically, students created strategies to handle such issues in a way that did not threaten their student status, regardless of whether athlete or non-athlete. Furthermore, 12 out of the 15 participants interviewed had experienced a negative incident related to their Black identity which included being denied admission to public areas or other nonverbal expressions of racism and discrimination (e.g. being subjected to stares and being followed by salespeople or security personnel when shopping). An interesting nonverbal cue was the fact that these respondents showed no surprise as they described these incidents, which seem to confirm their expectations that such incidents would arise during the persistence process.

> There were a lot of instances where I thought like White people were supposed to be better than me. A lot of instances where denied getting in parties because I was Black. You're a football player [but] I look in the window and see he [a White player] on the football team too. "Well you can't come in." - Jake

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Although they showed no surprise at these racist expressions they did express surprise that there were still people (Whites) who have never interacted with Black people before. For athletes it was not only an expectation from the students but also an expectation of coaches, signaling a connection to the development and negotiation of identity in the relational frame. The students reported that coaches sometimes helped them in navigating these issues; for example, athletes were 'coached' to respect White students and navigate these issues in ways that would allow them to remain eligible to play:

> When I first got here there was a group of Black students in 2004. The students they come to school and had never been places that had Black people. We would say, 'Hey how you doing?"and they would blatantly say at least 50 or 60 times. They would say "we can't talk to you because you are Black". You would think we are way beyond that. They [the coaches] would tell us just to be respectful and we would ask why they would say that. I can't talk because you're Black. Even some of our players -----"it's not personal we just don't like Black people". It was shocking to us because we didn't know it still existed. I was like completely thrown off, like she had never seen a Black person before! I was thinking like, man, we in the 2000s! – Willie

Similar experiences happened in other contexts, e.g. an off-campus party:

> I was the only Black roommate, by the way, in the house. We went to this house for the party and the door is open so you just kinda walk in as you please. But there was someone there playing security seeing who was coming in. All of the roommates were in front of me and I was about to walk in and I get stopped. This is my first experience with blatant racism. Before that I had never seen it. I was shocked. I get stopped and the dude looks me in the eye and he says there is no more room for you. - Teddy

> Yeah, I'm just not shocked at all. I'm sure I have. I can say that probably at least 75 percent of black students here on campus have experienced some type of racism. It's— I'm not shocked anymore so I would just say it's something that every [Black] student or every student at a predominantly white institution they're going to have to experience it in some way, shape or form. Even when you least expect it. - John

It is interesting that the majority of these Black males did not challenge the racism but took it either as a rite of passage that they had known was a part of the college experience or maybe just life for a Black male. Billy stated:

> Sometimes I felt a little bit of racism. At the end of the day, I just had to adapt to the situation. You just keep going…Of course, I would try to be friendly as possible saying hello, good morning and things like that. If someone really had a staring problem, I never like tried to escalate anything.

Instances like these seemed to be used to uphold the integrity of the Black identity by coaching others not to let these negative instances get to them, that there was a greater goal and reward at the end, thus expressing high regard for the enacted student identity as well as helping others develop their relational identity and also making a connection to what graduating will eventually mean to the communal identity. Specific to not only the communal identity, participants used the enacted frame of identity to protect the overall Black identity, which was a priority for them. Accepting these racist interactions was a negotiation of identity in the personal frame as Black males aimed to maintain their own dignity, stature and the pride of their community.

The responses to the current interview question were particularly important to understanding the matriculation process because it shows how they worked to erase uncertainties about perceived academic skill level and to build confidence, thus building and working on the personal layer of identity during the persistence process. The majority of the responses describing positive significant instances, illustrate moments related to academics and specifically clarify how the personal level of identity was managed and came to be more salient. The notable moments characterized as negative were responses where the Black identity was challenged. In relation to later interview questions related

to graduation, these responses will gain even greater significance as these negative

instances are viewed as hurdles during the persistence process.

Everyday Expression of Identity. The enacted identity is the primary identity

utilized in how students expressed themselves on campus. However, when asked about

the importance of everyday expression of identity, athletes and non-athletes made

reference to their communal identities and personal identities, respectively showing how

perceptions play a role in how they enact everyday expression. For athletes they referred

to both their athlete and Black communal identities making it clear that this enactment

was attached to a community.

> Just being on any football team, whether the place is predominantly White
> or anything, when you go on some like 18, 19, when you're like a grown
> kid and you out there, you kinda don't understand you representing real
> school. Like when you out in the community, things you do, you do
> something dumb, it's going to get put in the paper fast. – David

It seemed like when it came to the Black identity athletes were trying to find a balance

between displaying an appearance that was sometimes just shy of the stereotypical look

associated with being Black and what they thought a student should look and act like.

Jake stated, "My first years yes. I would keep the slang and all that intact when I am not

in class." However, Chris states that even coaches confirmed the existence of this tension

between Black communal identities and athlete communal identities by holding meetings

directed at the Black athletes.

> Not only did we believe that, the coaches believed that as well. We would
> have meetings—not with the whole team—specifically with the Black
> athletes on the team. We had a couple athletes that did fit the description.
> We had a guy he had dreadlocks. You had to cut your accent. It was like
> the way the portrayed him was kinda like a thug. I mean sometimes he'd
> wear his pants low, but he was still a student. He still got good grades.
> He was at the school for a reason, but the perception they had of him was
> just a thug, he's just here for the basketball, he wants to start trouble. The

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coaches sat us down—specifically the Black athletes—and let us know that we gotta shape up. I mean we gotta give them a different perception of us. We cannot act like we act all the time. You have to talk different. We have to smile a lot more. We have to be more presentable. We have to be more approachable so that the school community maybe accepts us a little bit more, that the teachers will wanna help us a little bit more.- Chris

This showed that overall, identity expression is important enough to put time and effort into not only by the students but also by the coaches to aid in changing perceptions.

The response from both athletes and non-athletes confirm the common overall theme that the Black identity in America is one that remains salient regardless of the interaction specifics or context. Like many Black males, these students reported that they are always very aware of their environment and who they are in this PWI environment. Their responses seem to indicate that movements, gestures, language and dress were strategically carried out in such a way that to support positive Black identity that does not perpetuate stereotypes. In this way their responses seem to indicate that the student identity is secondary to either being an athlete or being Black as noted above. Being that there were so few Blacks and Black males in this environment, they took it upon themselves to be positive representatives of being Black. Their responses did not reveal whether this was for a purpose of pride or because they felt they would be stereotyped either way as Black males. It could be the latter since many reported using strategies like appropriate language code switching so as not to confirm the stereotype of Blacks as uneducated and only speak slang or 'Ebonics'.

My first years, yes I would keep the slang and all that intact when I am not in class. When I am with my friends I am not losing [changing] nothing. As a junior and up it changed a little bit. Style changed a little bit. Still kept my swag but I cared a little bit more about how I was coming off to other people. - Jake

The strategies used which demonstrated identity negotiation practices and relate to the enacted, relational and communal frames of identity seemed to be attempts at changing the stereotype. In the personal frame, Black males acknowledged and showed a clear understanding of the common stereotypes, the implications of those stereotypes, and then asserted that changing the stereotype became important.

> I speak to everybody. Teachers, administration, other students. It was never, I would never show any anger towards anybody. If I was, I would go to the gym. I would always seem like I was happy. Put on that facade so they wouldn't think anything negative. So they wouldn't think anything. I was trying to display something different than what they were used to seeing. - Bernard

Previous research (Scott, 2013) has shown that for Black females language choice is a strategic communicative act used to maintain solidarity in one's community, distance one's self from non-Black communities and stereotypes that come from that community. Also code switching can be perceived as speaking with authority within non-Black communities. What Scott (2013) considered a type of border crossing and based on the work of Anzaldua (1987) is confirmed by the results of the current research. Interviewees described how stereotypes were managed through the enacted frame in many different ways including their use of language and dress. The interview data showed how Black males navigated their otherness in the PWI space. Specifically, they tried to 'walk the walk and talk the talk' of an educated person.

Another strategy used was trying to be more clearly articulate in front of others who were not Black so as not to perpetuate the stereotype of being dumb and/or uneducated (although having been admitted to and enrolled in the university should have made this unnecessary).

> In my classes that are majority ethnic minorities, I might find myself using African-American vernacular more. In my other classes I try to be a little more articulate. – John

Another stereotype students referenced was the way Black males "sag" their pants. When Black males do not to sag, they are saying 'I am not affiliated with the stereotype, nor to the group it may be attached to'.

> Sagging and giving off stereotypical image, it works against them [Black people] It does make a difference how you dress. Image and character and how you uphold yourself can go along way at the end of the day. – Jerry

These identity management practices were important because Black males were very aware of the stereotypes as well as their influence on others. As one participant made clear, not only did the White students know these stereotypes, they in turn responded by appropriating the stereotypes through mimicking dress and language. This was an interesting practice because the same identity being emulated is also the one that has been viewed as problematic.

> You don't look at us as academics or you don't think we're on the same level as you, academically. At the same time, the way we talk, the way we dress, the crowd that we're in, you kinda wanna be a part of that crowd. You try to emulate us in that way. I mean it's kinda flattering at the same time that they all wanna acknowledge us a certain way, but they emulated us as well. – Chris

It is important to note that although the Black males of this research were able to implement strategies for persistence, it was sometime difficult or even not possible to do this. Glenn & Johnson (2012) suggest that although minority students have strategies that are preferred it is not always possible due to the lack of power in the PWI environment. To say that Whites and/or a dominant cultural group is positioned to be in power, it can also be said that they also make it permissible for students of color to be able to enact such strategies. In this negotiation of power, it seems that Whites give up just enough

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power for Black students to feel that those strategies can be potentially validated. Considering this, the power Black students have on PWI campuses is temporary and sporadic.

Identity management for athlete and non-athlete participants is important to the overall enacted, relational and communal frames because managing a racial stereotype is essentially acknowledging the perception of the group and your membership in the group. On the relational level stereotypes and knowing the perception of stereotypes has the potential to contextualize interactions. This directly influences enacted identities, which are affected and negotiated during communication processes, and therefore a way of negotiating the way identity is enacted in the PWI context. Participants also noted how others changed their enacted identities thru communication, based on stereotypes:

> I could be walking down to a class and then an Asian or somebody would say, "What's up?" and give me five and the same Asian kid I could see saying hi to his friend, and it's different. – Shawn

Acknowledging the meaning of stereotypes and the potential for stereotype threat was clearly demonstrated by these Black males. Participants all knew what those stereotypes meant, not only to their racial group but to their personal identities. They knew that when the stereotype is in play, others perceive Black males as having nothing going for themselves, that they are loud, angry, thugs and wear baggy clothes. They then chose to manage their personal identity (in the personal frame) explicitly so as not to be associated with these stereotypes, by enacting behaviors counter to the stereotypes. They made it clear that their style of dress had power, even more so for athletes, and strategically managed the ways they dressed, and thus managed the ways others perceived them.

As a junior and up it changed a little bit. Style changed a little bit. Still kept my swag but I cared a little bit more about how I was coming off to other people. Like how they were seeing me. – Jake

Ways of changing dress also included just looking good rather than bringing attention to things like sagging. I deemed this a way of retailoring the stereotype. So although the negative stereotype may continue to be perpetuated, Black males wanted to show that Black males are well dressed and have 'swag'. These ideas about everyday expression reflect their understanding that they have a voice that can be influential on many levels.

Although a group or community identity is associated with the PWI context, Black males did not have strong expression related to a student identity unless it was related to the Black student identity. Being a Black student adds a dimension to the otherwise muted by default identity of being a student. I concluded that the student identity for this particular group of students becomes implied and is a default identity. Theoretically, there is and should be no difference between these students and any other students enrolled at the campus. However, the data seem to show that, in this PWI context, the Black identity that rests in both the personal and relational frames heavily impacts the enacted and communal frame of student identity, as it takes on its own layer as Black student identity.

Voice, Proof of Presence and Re-Shaping Perceptions Which Fueled Race Issues

Having a voice was a channel for enacting identity. Black males at PWIs had an overall aim to be an aid to changing the stereotypes by using their voices. Specifically, with athletes, through identity processes aim to also change the stereotypes of athletes. Although non-athletes are not necessarily coached, athletes are. They are coached on

identity on campus and maintaining a positive image as they represent themselves as well

as the school. Change was highly pushed by coaches which represents the communal

frame and the relational and enacted frames relevant to specific interactions with coaches.

> I had a Black assistant coach. He was Black and he always used to say,
> "You guys need to dress, set yourself apart. Don't play to the stereotypes.
> – Shawn

On the personal level, Black males understood the ability to change perceptions as

an interaction to be able to, once again, use their voices to be seen as representatives of

the community and to be able to report back as experts on how to act. An element of

pride was embedded into this action. Being able to report back to the community was not

always a positive report, however, especially for the athletes; as shown earlier, they were

subjected to overt and blatant racism and discrimination. Also, they (athletes) tended to

be exposed to more intense stereotypes when traveling. They spoke of receiving threats

during their games at other universities which include racial hate words as well as

messages written in locker rooms stating the hate for 'niggers'. The similarity here

between athletes and non-athletes was that both had come to expect this and identity

management processes were more salient as they still worked to manage their own

identities and the perceptions of others.

Negotiations of the communal identity came as a result of trying to maintain a

positive identity in terms of representing the race well and giving White people and

students an alternative view of Black identity. For example, in the town surrounding the

university, Bernard stated the following in reference to how to handle race issues when

he and friends were referred to as 'niggers':

I'm not gonna get involved [in the racial incident] because it is not that serious. It's just a word. It's not affecting me. Their level of ignorance. Y'all gotta realize we're in an all-White town. – Bernard

As a response to these (inevitable) race issues and stereotyping, Black males used strategies of adapting, dealing with it, or retailoring which are all considered non-confrontational coping strategies identified in previous research of strategic responses to discrimination (Major, Quinton, & McKoy, 2002). Dealing with it sometimes meant just accepting (not responding overtly) to the behavior. In instances of adapting, Black male athletes coached each other on behaviors of how to adapt. One of the strategies was to urge the next Black male to see the bigger picture. Another was self-policing, and being respectful, in spite of the circumstances. The overall strategy was to keep in perspective that graduation and school are more important than a few impactful incidents. One participant stated an instance of resistance, however, where the strategy was much different than the others. He described how, as a group they decided to resist by standing against it and stating that they would not take the abuse anymore.

> One day we were in the cafeteria and the woman that was taking our cards she would always make comments like there's the colored section. And we used to say whaaat? A one point we didn't blow up we started letting people know. The second we heard it, it is not gonna happen no more. After we made our mind up we had to find a way to address it respectfully and not cause a riot. And that's what we did. We would tell them how we felt. That was awful. All of 2002 there was nothing but disrespectful racial experiences. I think it was harder for us actually. – Willie

For non-athletes, racism and race issues were more general, and less specific and in its most basic form related to the communal Black identity. These Black males stated already being used to instances like being stared at in other spaces so it was not a big issue to move forward with specific strategies, and there was not an overwhelming

response to the question of whether there was any direct opposition to Whites during the time of persistence.

Given the experiences of these Black males at PWI campuses, it was interesting to understand, based on the awareness of how a Black identity characterizes spaces of inhabitation, whether Black males felt they had something to prove. The responses had to do mostly with the communal frame of identity. Athletes only had wishes to disprove the stereotypes about them as athletes. The more overwhelming response was the recognition that others had paved the way for them to get a degree as a Black person. So what was to be proven was that the Black male voice is valid because the ancestors fought heroically for it. What was interesting about this response was that athletes were able to separate the black identity from athlete identity where the centrality between race and status shifts. Overall, the desire is to prove to Whites as well as others in the community that this can be done.

These instances led them to become more aware of wrongdoing and indicated the clear line between them and 'others'. Some of the more specific issues discussed by athletes revealing how negative perceptions affect their campus interactions included being denied admission to parties, being stared or gawked at, and being challenged-- which was perceived as only occurring due to their being Black, stereotyped as being uneducated, and therefore unwelcomed.

> The [other] students they come to school and had never been places that had Black people. We would say hey "how you doing?", and they would blatantly say at least 50 or 60 times. They would say we can't talk to you because you are Black. You would think we are way beyond that. Coaches would tell us just to be respectful and we would ask why they would say that. I can't talk because you're black. Even some of our players -----it's not personal we just don't like Black people. - Willie

I had one history professor. He gave all the Black males despite if you did all the work to get a 100% you are not going to get nothing higher than a C. Period. I felt it was unfair and I voiced my opinion to him several times. He said "I don't care what you say. It's not gonna change. I been doing it that way since I been here. You either deal with it or go somewhere else." He told me that. No matter what. – Bernard

Of the descriptions that were present of how Black males proved and reshaped perceptions by using their voices were related to the classroom and general social interaction. When speaking of interpersonal interactions in the classroom, it was mostly in being aware of having a voice amidst a context of being perceived as voiceless or uneducated and it having potential to even the playing field.

Just being able to interact in the classroom and being able to like help others and like lead group discussions and things like that. I found that was like really major to me, 'cause I never thought that I would be able to understand or grasp something for a predominantly White school. They'll listen to me and my ideas and take everything in consideration, I think that was a pretty good thing as far as educational-wise. – Willie

Like I said that one or two teachers supported me a lot. I felt more supported from my classmates when I got into that advertising group. Because I found a voice in it all. I would speak up in class. When I started doing that –speaking up and answering questions and being more confident, I found a lot of people gravitating towards me. It didn't matter what color I was then. I could sit there and debate and have an open discussion. – Jake

In realizing that the relational interactions could lead to areas of available support, participants began to find what seemed like a more comfortable space to communicate, although still amongst a context perceived to have less genuine care for actual outcomes.

I really started speaking out when I started meeting with my professors twice and three times a week. If I didn't understand something, I would go to their office hours. When I went to their office hours like I really got a grasp of the material. When I got back that following day, I was just on it. I got a little bit more extra repetition than probably the other students. - David

Athletes specifically felt that their presence in the classroom and their interpersonal

interactions were impacted by their communal athlete identity. In this respect, they

perceived themselves to be judged on that identity which, in turn, impacted the student

identity to the point that they felt their outcomes in relation to academics, like papers and

assignments, were graded harder and snide comments were made in reference to their

ability. This affected the type of interactions athletes would have in the relational frame

and this extended not only to professors but also to teacher's aides. This was clear

indication for athletes of how the Black identity and athlete identity are salient and strong

factors in outside perception simultaneously.

> With some teachers it was said that they didn't like athletes, particularly Black athletes because they thought that everything was given to them, that they didn't wanna work for it. It kinda made it a little bit more difficult as far as the grading scale or what was expected of them, kinda held us to a higher level than the rest of the class. If we got caught talking or we got caught doing something wrong, it wasn't like a slap on the hand. It was more like okay, well, it's time for you to get out of the class or we're gonna tell your coach. It wasn't like well, be quiet this time, like the other students that did. – Chris

> I could always feel them. Like I could feel the vibe. It was never really verbalized, but I could feel like, "They just think I'm a dumb jock with how they're talking to me." There were cynical remarks and stuff and always bringing up basketball. When I ask them about a question, in geography, they'd, "Oh great game" and then being cynical about it. We're not talking about basketball. We're talking about the subject. Why are you always bringing up something that I'm doing off—it's not even related to what we're talking about right now, so why you gonna bring it up and then make the whole class laugh, which was funny, but it's like okay. I'm more than a basketball player, more than a black athlete. I'm also a student here, so why don't you be cognizant of that and congratulate me on getting a B on my test or something like that or make it seem like that I'm actually kinda playing an integral part in getting my degree here. – Shawn

Black Visibility. Specific to the communal frame, Black males were asked of the chances that they would see another African American face on campus. The overwhelming response was "one or two others". For athletes, when they were able to see another Black student on campus, it was automatically assumed that that person was an athlete as well.

> When I was at [School X] it was like pretty much the only black people at school was just athletes, like track team, basketball, they didn't have a football team. – Shawn

These results are interesting because essentially, the Black male had internalized the stereotype previously mentioned, that all Black people at these campuses must be athletes. However, it is also a reality in many cases. For athletes, since many chose a college based on scholarship availability, they were in small and rural towns so even in the town and outside of campus there were few Blacks. The mere existence of such issues on the college campus in many of the rural areas that athletes experience racism is an indication of the demographic landscape of the surrounding towns and cities. As described in previous arguments supported by critical race theory and co-cultural theory, when racism and discrimination is experienced in the macro-context, it is also experienced on a smaller scale in microcontexts, often with the same impact. If it can be concluded that one of the issues beyond the existence of racism itself is the issue of lack of exposure to Black individuals in the PWI context this may be an issue for universities to explore, to find ways to better represent this community on campus to provide a more sound perspective that reflects the goals of the university rather than the reality of the macro-context.

Support and Group Involvement. During the persistence process the issue of support is relevant to identity, as support came in the form of potential people and available resources. I preface this section with the fact that this view of support will be in reference only to the frames of identity. A more in depth account of the overall presence and value of support will be covered in the next research question. That being stated, athletes felt that being a part of other groups on campus besides the athletic team would be too much of a burden on their time and thus, the communal athletic identity with a potential to ruin eligibility due to overextending themselves. Bernard stated, "We had to work 10 times harder than the average student." Sports were considered an all-consuming group membership.

> Every day you have to wake up, go to class, practice, study hall, and then maybe you have a night workout and then you go back. It's so structured and routine that you really don't have time for anything else. - Shawn

Support during the intense time of persistence for athletes came from their athletic family although the quality of that support was lacking for some. By default, that was the place to go for support, with potential to develop the athletic and student identity through relational means. However, some athletes admitted to not being able to fully communicate their experiences to coaches or other team members who were not Black.

> I never really talked to any coaches about anything personal. Even though they were open to it and they told me they were, that's just giving more rocks to be thrown at you. - Jake

This makes clear the idea that although support is present at an institution in many forms, it is not necessarily the type of support beneficial to all students. Since some of the players went to small schools, finding groups on campus aimed at support for ethnic

students was unheard of. One male sarcastically described it as an "abomination" to

have any Black groups on campus, given the racial tone of the school.

On the other hand, some athletes expressed the fact that they found many

professors and coaches to be very supportive and at times they were surprised at the fact

that these professors were in so much support of them.

> As long as you've got that support like we had—we had tutors come with us on the road sometimes to make sure we did our term papers, to make sure we studied for our finals. Our coach was always in our ear, "Make sure you get the grade done. Make sure you guys go to class. - Chris

> Then my counselor, she kept showing how close I was. Wasn't wasting my time. If your counselor wastes your time it's like fuck! But if you have a counselor doing their job and leading you in the right direction even though you don't know where you want to go. - Jake

Athletes made clear that support was only useful when those supporting them were

actually doing their jobs. Although a clear definition of support was not displayed from

athletes, it was clear that they knew what beneficial support was when they experienced

it. When asked if there were any groups needed on campus as another form of support,

none expressed a need for Black groups on campus. However, non-athletes stated a need

for more role models or a more diverse staff. John stated the following in regards to a

need for more role models during the persistence process.

> I think there are definitely enough. There are actually about like 25 to 27 black constituent groups… I don't think there's a group, per se, that we need on campus, but we do need different role models here. Not only professors; a more diverse faculty staff but we need students to be honest with themselves and with each other. - John

> In the relational frame, this indicates an effort at developing that identity through

the availability of role models—not only through faculty or staff but also in other

students. Black males seek support from other Black authorities and students on campus

who are capable of mentoring them and understanding the issues they encounter during the persistence process. This also shows how identity in the personal frame is potentially affected by the availability of role models to shape the personal identity. Although this was a request of Black males, when asked who played a major role in getting to graduation, there was a huge amount of praise for the self. This may be due to the fact that because there were few role models the only response was to be self-reliant.

The personal frame was very relevant in understanding the ultimate source of support for the Black males of the present study. Being able to praise the self shows a confidence in the self. Black males showed that having set goals and being able to make decisions for themselves proved to be a great step toward graduation. Black males were able to show themselves as independent as mentioned previously but also as goal setters with achievement. Athletes specifically went on to say that being able to have such confidence allowed them to be successful.

> I would say my work ethic, just being able to replicate that, not only in the classroom but on the football field. I would say that pretty much got me just that blue-collar mentality; work, work, work and it'll pay off. That helped me out the most, I would say. Being success—I mean success rides everyone. If you're doing good at something that's gonna bring confidence. Once I started succeeding that just brought confidence. - Billy

Many athletes looked at themselves as role models to their communities at home and for the younger athletes. In the communal frame of identity, being decision makers results in these athletes being leaders in their athletic groups.

After giving praise to themselves, Black males ranked family as the next group of people who played a role in getting to graduation. Overall, for these students, the personal, relational and enacted frames tended to be more important to identity than the

communal frame. With so much praise for self, getting support from Black student

groups was not considered an influence toward persistence.

In response to whether they ever doubted they would get a degree, Black males

overwhelmingly stated that there was never a time when they thought they would not

finish or graduate. This was a clear goal similar to that discussed above. This was

interesting and aligns with the progression of athletes where by this time, graduation had

become a primary goal. For all Black males, in the personal frame of identity there was

again much praise for self. In the relational frame, Black males stated that they wanted to

be able to show others their accomplishments which confirms the relational, and thus, the

enacted frame of identity. In the communal frame, showing the progress to their

respective communities as a sign of pride was an achievement for Black males.

> No. I knew I was going to finish. I knew I was gonna graduate. Not that I knew. That was a goal. That's what I was there for. I wasn't there to drop out, or for the social scene or to lollygag. I was in school for a reason. - Teddy

> I had those days where I was like, "Dang, this is a little bit too tough. " If I change my major to like sociology or something like that, what most of my teammates were taking just to get a degree, but I wanted the challenge. I always had an interest in the science. I wanted to take that challenge. - Shawn

The personal frame of identity was salient here as it was acknowledged that they

encountered challenges during this persistence journey but quitting was not an option. In

very few instances where there was a possibility of not finishing, it was due to financial

issues which were eventually worked out so they were able to continue pursuing the

degree. Overall, being able to show one's community back home about the

accomplishment of graduating was also about showing how to get over *any* hurdle.

I felt that it molded me to not let anything bring me down Because I needed to finish for me, my nieces and nephews and my parents and tell them it's not too late and you can do it. - Vance

In summary, upon the realization that there would not be many people of color to be role models and to mentor, when asked who they sought support from for graduating, athletes said they went to other athletes who shared their experience, thus building the relational identity. They also minimally sought support from coaches, counselors and roommates. These people allowed them to enact strategies of talking as a coping mechanism but seemed to not completely trust these individuals. In listening to these responses it seemed like these males struggled with identifying who they were actually using to lean on for support. This relates to the previous discussion and their requests for more Black role models and mentors. Overall, for athletes, talking was a strategy employed for getting through issues related to school.

For non-athletes, they sought support from family. This response aligns with the initial questions of college choice as non-athlete chose colleges based on proximity to family for support. The personal and relational frames worked hand in hand when it comes to identity here as working on the self included interpersonal interactions for support.

After: Graduation and Beyond

Persisting and Finishing: Identifying the Major Motivation Toward Graduation. Based on the responses to the previous questions, it is not surprising that the overwhelming response to the importance of graduation was ranked at the utmost importance and connected to a personal frame of identity. With goals in place to persist despite the obstacles, it is only fitting that graduation remain important. Reasons for

wanting to graduate centered on two themes (1) it would be a waste of time not to and (2) to be able to show this achievement to others in the community and what was termed the 'haters', or those who doubted that it could happen. This signaled the relational and enacted frames of identity because although there were people who may not have wanted to see these Black males graduate, the nature of those relationships seemed to motivate Black males to finish and have something to show for it.

> Even if you don't accept me you have to hand me that paper. My paper don't say Black and the other don't say White. So we are all getting the same degree. I held on just like your favorite White people held on. - Willie

As an afterthought to my interview process, I decided to ask each of the Black males what it meant to be Black and in college. The responses to this question summed up and supported the previous responses. In the personal frame, Black males felt that their presence as Black individuals attending college was of high importance. It was stated that it showed commitment, sacrifice and competence despite and outside perceptions.

> For males it means a lot to be in college. It shows commitment and shows sacrifice. That's the biggest thing. I think that's the biggest thing Black males are missing. That's why a lot us aren't successful in a lot of things. Because we want the instant gratification. We need it now or we can't wait because we always think we are going to die tomorrow. I see why some people feel like that because you livin like you gon die tomorrow. But if we could sacrifice-college shows a sacrifice, a commitment and it shows a need for knowledge. - Jake

Many of these Black males continued with the self-praise, acknowledging that their position was a powerful one since it allows them to be in a space to disprove many stereotypes about Black males. The interactions and behaviors displayed by Black males rest in the enacted frame in relevance to the relational demands of interpersonal

communication with family. Being able to report back to the family as a whole and to make parents proud was a highlight for Black males. But it was also seen as a personal highlight where at one point the goal was to prove Whites wrong. By the end of the experience Black males took ownership of their success and claimed it as a great accomplishment for themselves.

> Being a part of that—you know because I knew I wanted to be a part of that. I didn't go out with—I didn't go out with something to prove to white students. I went out with something to prove to myself. Because to me it kind of fostered an environment of what the real world is gonna be like. - Marlan

Beyond the persistence process being one that has potential to strengthen relationships, it was also clear that Black males had much pride in being able to disprove stereotypes and to stand as a leader for the Black race. It was stated that being at this point of persistence is to be the change that many ancestors fought for. The overall responses to this question confirm previous responses where parents were excited more so about attending than graduating. In this case it aligns with the idea that being in attendance is a great achievement in itself.

In contrast to this idea, participants were asked what it means to be Black and to have graduated from college, specifically attempting to understand the salience of the Black communal identity in relation to graduation. I noticed much more of a clear response to the previous question. Many were in a stage where they were waiting to see the benefits although they 'knew' it had some benefit. Overall, they wanted it to be an inspiration to others. So graduation itself seemed like a group benefit to show the community and the actual experience was more satisfactory to the personal, relational and enacted frames of identity.

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To summarize the findings from this research question, each phase of the persistence process, before during and after, showed key areas of identity relevance. Before the actual persistence phase relational identities were very relevant in that parent involvement played a huge role in how students came to understand the value of attending college. It aided students in building their personal and relational identities because they could see themselves as worthy, and could become proud of their hard work once persistence began. It also allowed them to strengthen relationships with parents as their enacted identities were characterized by efforts to do well so parents could be proud of them. Relational identities were illustrated by the enactment of honoring their roles in the parent-child relationship.

During persistence, Black males illustrated three main areas where identity was relevant. First, Black males continued to build their relational identities as they held onto support that came from parents during the pre-college phase. They were also aware that during the persistence period support from other authority figures was rare; support came mostly from other peers, making it about relational identities in this area. Second, during this period the choice of which college to attend was dependent on student type, causing different identities to be utilized in the beginning phase of actual persistence. Since athletes mainly attended college to participate in sports, their athlete identity was more relevant that their student identity. For non-athletes, since they attended college to persist and graduate, their student identity was the first identity enacted during persistence. As athletes later used their student identity to commit to persisting to graduation rather than persisting to 'play', they ultimately obtained degrees for personal purposes. Once a

commitment to graduation was evident, personal identities were very important to persisting, adapting, navigating and graduating.

Third, significant moments were described as relevant to communal cultural identity. Being a Black student dictated how they would be treated and perceived as Black males experienced stereotype threats. Specifically for athletes they felt their voice and presence in the classroom space was impacted by their communal athlete identity. Race issues during this time were covert for non-athletes and more overt for athletes.

Overall, the black identity was problematic and caused negative perceptions for all Black students. Due to this perception, Black males maintained black visibility by adjusting and adapting to circumstances. They realized there was a lack of care from others so they used communal identities as a reason for taking care of each other (Black students). Their voices were used to disprove stereotypes of the communal identity stating that it was necessary because their ancestors created the possibility for the educational experience so it was the job of the Black student to protect that opportunity. \

Lastly, in the phase of persistence related to graduation and beyond graduation Black males praised themselves heavily for successfully persisting. This level of recognition of the personal identity was prevalent especially in this phase because they realized that the enactments of their student identity is what got them to this point. Some students were hopeful of the opportunities graduating would provide. However, many were recently graduated and were still waiting to see how the degree would contribute to their futures.

RQ3: According to Black male graduates, what is the value of social support

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during the PWI experience?

Previous research has shown that social support plays a role in the persistence of students as they develop as individuals in higher education institutions (Tinto, 1993). Subsequently, support would seem to play a role in the process of identity negotiation and management processes as students persist to graduation. Therefore, this research question aimed to discover whether these Black students saw any value in support that was related to identity processes as they persist through the experience at PWIs. Specifically, did the presence of social support aid in developing, maintaining or negotiating identities important to this PWI context? Overall, support came in many forms before, during and after the persistence process and the data also revealed that social support and academic support were the types of support most conceivable by students.

Definitional issues came up when understanding the significance of responses in connection to the types of support present during this experience There were two types of support discussed by students—academic and social support, with some overlap between the two. Social support was defined mainly as coming from friends and family and also including any persons who are supportive in the persistence process. Academic support was defined as help given by professors and coaches and also friends and family who provided support by tutoring and giving homework help. However, in describing potential help given by professors or counselors, students also described their support as having a social dimension where it seemed that they expected professors to care, not to just provide support to get a check.

> I feel like some of the teachers here did a good job in molding their students to what they needed to get out of the class in order to apply it to their lives. Others I just feel like they do it to get by for a paycheck. - Vance

So, it seems, that there is overlap between academic and social support based on the data because both have a social element.

This overlap in meaning turned out to be problematic for two reasons. First, in later defining institutional support, it was not clear whether participants knew the difference between institutional and social support, making data analysis for the last two research questions problematic. Second, academic support can also be considered what the institution provides as far as programs and resources like longer library hours, but academic support can be seen as a subset of social support because the friends and family and developing relationships can be involved in academic support. So, to account for these differences in interpretation and perception, academic support in this research and relevant to this research question is being defined as a subset of social support, since this is in contrast to analysis for the next research question which addresses the value of institutional support.

Responses relevant to professors, administrators and other participants of authority on the PWI campus will be treated as either individuals who have potential to provide both academic support and social support which joins them with the group of friends and family who are also able to provide both types of support specifically through communication processes. I will therefore make clear in this analysis, what type of support each individual is offering in their relational role discussed.

As discussed earlier, prior to the actual experience of attending a PWI, Black males discussed support in the form of encouragement to attend. A number of people aided in encouraging the students to attend college but also for entirely different reasons depending on the status of the student as a high school participant. These instances served as early support efforts that contributed to developing identities which would be relevant to the college experience. For athletes, data analysis revealed that they did not find much positive encouragement from the people who one would generally expect to be giving encouragement at that stage of life and during the high school process. Athletes felt there was little to no encouragement for academics from counselors, teachers and even parents, but an effort at encouragement and support for athletics came from coaches and sports affiliated figures.

> There wasn't really any real encouragement as far- even in high school as far as academics and stuff like that it was more like kinda a guess a push for academics stopped after sophomore year. After that it was just like go to school you're doing ok-average. There wasn't like a big push for As and Bs although my sister was. It was different for me. I mean it was more like graduate [from high school] kinda thing. And either military or college was the option and I knew I didn't want to go to military and I had to get to college and except for athletics I didn't know why as far as academically. - Jake

> Never [encouraged]. I think the simple fact that I was never challenged because I was Black and I was a student athlete. Most likely if I was going to college off academics, like I got a full scholarship because I was a 4.0 student and art expert and stuff, yeah, there probably would have been more haters in the community like, "Oh, this nigger think he's white.' But in basketball, "Oh you're going to hoop." So that wasn't it. - Shawn

> From teachers, no. At that time it didn't seem as if the teachers knew who the football players were. They kinda feel like they know the path of kids. It's not if you keep doing this it's gonna happen. That wasn't the conversation. It was you're just not gonna go anywhere in life. Like no matter what. The only thing that motivated me was the fact that my friends were going too. - Willie

Support in the form of encouragement for non-athletes came from parents in direct and

indirect ways. The indirect push from parents was more of an understanding that was

built into family conversations about college which happened over a duration of time, not

just prior to high school graduation. This can be seen as a supportive effort at

encouraging students to build and strengthen their identities through education.

> I don't know if they were pushing me like it was mandatory but it was
> definitely indirectly expected. - Jerry

> It was pretty much get out of high school and go to college but they just
> kept saying college, college but they never said university or 4 year. I felt
> like it was pushed a lot with my family. - Vance

In the more direct ways of encouraging and supporting a student life in college, parents

pushed in ways that showed the connection between being in college and being

successful individuals. For both athletes and non-athletes (parental encouragement was

reported less by athletes), the data showed, as describe earlier, that this connection of

college enrollment to life success was a very influential and selling factor, as they

reflected on where they were, physically and mentally, and where they wanted to end up.

> My mom was big on getting a higher education besides high school degree
> so she was the one who really got on me. - Jerry

> Even my moms and my family—even friends would tell me. It was
> pushed as understanding if we want to ever be successful you got to go to
> college. - Raymond

Across all participants, friends were a big motivational effort and source of support.

Athletes and non-athletes found encouragement from friends who had already attended

and those who were moving along the same timeline to attend. But, in high school, it

seemed like counselors and teachers were significantly less influential in the support

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process than parents and friends, and thus less influential in the beginning stages of college student identity processes.

Social support from friends took the form of group goals or similar goals which were most readily identified by Black males as a source of support. As Bernard stated, peer pressure was used as a motivator and considered good when coming from friends and it was taken as a challenge. The interaction and communication between friends to pass back and forth inspiration to attend college is in turn a method of negotiating the identity to grow and build a student identity in college. Friendships had direct effects on these participants as John reported, that speaking to a friend who had already started attending college allowed him to consider something he never really thought of before-- applying to college. And other student provided similar examples:

> The only thing that motivated me was the fact that my friends were going too. - Willie

> The couple friends I had, that's just us. We grew up in poverty; none of our parents went to college so it was a personal goal. We pushed each other. They were my motivation. We just pushed each other. - Bernard

It was interesting that contrary to previous research suggesting that academic counselors in high school are helpful in introducing students to the idea of college (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011), this group of Black males stated that there was very minimal push from high school counselors. And if there was any push, it was assumed that they were only doing their jobs without caring about the outcome for the student.

> There were advisors for sure. But I just figured that's what they were supposed to say. It was kind of hard to see who really cared about it.. - Tommy

It is possible that counselors were not mentioned much by athletes because the athletes may not have shown any interest in attending college until it was presented to them by coaches and viewed as a way to escape their neighborhood environment. The data show that teachers seemed to play an even smaller role in showing support or encouragement for both athletes and non-athletes.

> There are a thousand students in the school but only three counselors. The counselors are not specialized in college counseling. I know my friend, her school, she had not only scheduling counselors but college counselors. I didn't have that. I only had myself and my own knowledge of like the college education process through reading what's online to help me figure it out. - John

It seems that for athletes, if that push was not there from coaches and sports affiliated people, they maybe would not have made it to college. When asked if they had any desire to attend college prior to discussions with others, there was an overwhelming negative response. Some then clarified that they had no desire to go for academics, but when they saw the opportunity to attend with a focus on sports, athletes saw this as a 'ticket' to get out of their environments.

> Naw education wise naw. I didn't have a need. With a degree, what I was wanting to be-I didn't know anything about none of that but athletics. - Jake

> No. I had no desire to go outside of sports. - Willie

This seemed to reinforce the ideas expressed when asked about the initial reasons for wanting to go to college where the split between athletes and non-athletes was evident. Parental and friend support was more of an influence for non-athletes to attend while coaches and sports related figures were more seen as support for athletes to attend. Due

to financial constraints, sports in college were the only way to secure a better future for

athletes.

> I went to University of Alaska, Fairbanks before I went to another school
> for a year. Everything I do is for basketball. If I didn't play basketball my
> parents couldn't pay for college. I used it as a tool to get to college. Used
> that to get my degree. - Bernard

Slight pressures to be the 'first' to attend or the first to graduate served as motivators for

attending. In addition, other motivators for athletes included to play sports. These

instances, if used as indicators of developing identity can be seen as direct, yet also

sometimes indirect, ways of building the sports identity, the personal-family identity and/

or the personal identity. Specifically for athletes, it was later into the experience that they

had a turning point, which fueled any desire to build and strengthen the student identity.

I read this in many cases as the student identity being secondary to the athlete identity up

until the turning point where the two identities either become equal or are renegotiated

and ranked according to the larger goal. Further, the data indicated that as graduation

neared, the student identity became more important to athletes while for non-athletes the

student identity remained at the forefront.

> Well, I would say my first semester my freshman year, it was all about just
> football, football, football. Once I started taking classes and I seen myself
> excelling at it, my opinion actually swapped. It was more student *and*
> athlete, because the athletics came easy to me. The school was more of a
> challenge. When you get a challenge, that really motivates you and wants
> you to push harder. - Billy

> My initial reason was just to go forward and play football because I knew
> I needed college to play football. I didn't really feel like education—don't
> get me wrong it is important but when you are dealing with a circle of
> people that never been to college, the motivation of going to college that's
> there is not a full motivation because they never did it. - Willie

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Support during the experience was revealed to be something that was not frequently sought out by Black males but there were evident instances of support seeking. This was especially true for athletes. When athletes sought support, there was a very clear issue to be dealt with which had potential to threaten any given identity. Support was mostly discussed as a problem based interaction. It was less evident that the support process for athletes was about being proactive and preventative interaction. Black males sought solutions to issues that covered a number of subjects including academic and personal issues.

> Mostly if I had a problem with a teacher, how they taught or are they treating me fair 'cause of my grades, I go to my coaches and usually nine times out of ten it'd be fixed. - Willie

> I had a [unclear], and whatever happened, we definitely had each other's back. - David

> As far as if I had problems with a teacher or directly with my coaches, if I had problems with a person then usually I just go to them or address them directly. I didn't really have problems with people. - Shawn

When speaking about support, the data revealed that many of the athletes alluded to issues of privacy when it came to seeking support about personal issues. This revealed that there may be some instances of identity management and negotiation present in the process of seeking support that aim to make private some areas of the personal layer of identity.

> I didn't put up too much of my business, but I did go to him for advice and a little bit of comfort just because he knows where I'm coming from. I felt the most comfortable talking to him, besides my other athlete friends - Billy

> To really divulge yourself to people, you never know how they are going to use it or take it. There was a lot going on in college. - Jake

In relation to non-athlete tendency to be more proactive about seeking support, this showed to me that the openness of the individual to be able to do so sacrifices some instances of privacy as was shown for athletes.

Athletes expressed that the support received from parents during the experience came from keeping in contact with parents and speaking briefly about minor details. Parents encouraged students to seek help and assistance for addressed academics, not something that parents could offer suggestions about.

> Her [my mom's] big thing was making sure that I was doing okay, I wasn't hungry or anything like that. She asked me about classes a lot, because that was a big thing for her, grades. That's with every parent. - Billy

> My dad was always on me about academics. Every time I called, he would make sure—if I had any difficult classes, am I seeking help. If I'm not doing well in a class, he wanted to always make sure I was seeking help. Also, he wanted to make sure in the classes I was doing good he congratulated me. - Chris

When instances arose in which a student would need to talk or share information or ideas related to the college experience Black male athletes tended to lean more on those people they knew they could trust and had some previous interaction with. This was especially so for the athletes. They tended to lean on fellow players, coaches and professors with whom they had built previous relationships.

> The guys were from all over so we kinda developed our own thing and kinda stuck together and to this day we are real tight. - Willie

> I didn't really have an outlet. My outlet was at home with my roommate. We were roommates for 3 or 4 years even though most people change every year. We came and I had the same surgery, so we were really tight. Our outlet was to just come in sit on the couch and talk. No matter how stressed out we were, just talk about it. How much fun we had, we talk. So he was really like a brother. That was a big outlet for me. As far as campus support, I never really talked to any coaches about anything

personal. Even though they were open to it, and they told me they were, but that's just giving more rocks to be thrown at you. - Jake

My coach--well, he's like my surrogate father/coach. He's been with us since high school. I went to him, and he kinda guided us through letting us know it was gonna be okay, that we were going to a great school that had great support from the athletic and academic department. All they wanted us to do is succeed, and they gave us all the resources to succeed. - Chris

It is not known from the data whether persons sought out for support were also Black although in later data it was confirmed the students wants wanted more people of color for role models. Having a person to go to, when support was sought, who potentially had answers to questions of concern was seen as aiding the identity negotiation process, as they persisted to graduation.

When I had issues off campus, a person that I really leaned on and had a lot of extra help from was actually one of my professor's grad students. He was an African-American. He actually went to Auburn and got his master's and his doctorate degree at Idaho. I actually leaned on him. I was just like, "Dang, man, how did you do it all these years? What'd you do?" I sort of looked for his knowledge. He was a huge critical mentor. His advice and just his credentials. I mean the dude's credentials were like long. He's your typical kid out of Alabama. For him to go that far, it was just like wow, if he can do this, I know I can do it. - Billy

I didn't have big circle, but the ones I had, we was real tight…we definitely had each other's back. It wasn't nobody's mom or anybody's people to come and help us out, so anything that went ugly, we all kind of had to pass the hat around and put cash in the hat or whatever we had to do to help the situation out. - David

For non-athletes, using support as a proactive measure of persistence was more evident. Non-athlete use of support was to get aid in areas that would keep the student thriving as best as he could as he persisted through the college journey. Non-athletes tended to seek support for talking, learning about new things and staying motivated.

Motivational efforts speak to several of the levels or frames of identity as outlined by

CTI.

> [I spoke to] other peers even though they were not in my major. Family.
> The ones that did go to school. I spoke to them quite a bit. They helped
> me get going. - Tommy

> Going back to the step program that was linked to the EOP program. And
> it offered both tutoring services and psychological services. Those were
> offered but I didn't do either. Being in that environment helped me learn
> things though. Learned to talk to mentors and faculty. Whenever I had a
> question, I had people I could go to. …. The two main [sources of support]
> were the EOP program and the Black studies department.- Teddy

Linking back to the conversations had with parents during the experience, it

seems that overall, Black males, as first generation college students, expected to only get

support from parents that was fairly general, characterized as parental obligation to check

on their child and care for them, rather than specific help with the college experience. In

these relationships, Black males fueled their student identity minimally and fulfilled their

identity as children of their parents, to stay in contact whenever possible and to build,

maintain or sustain the parent-child relationship.

> Data also revealed that for a majority of the athlete participants, personal

satisfaction and personal motivation was their biggest support system. This shows a

possible negotiating and high ranking of the personal identity during the experience, as

something that has direct influence on the behaviors of Black males as they persist.

> Me seeing how close I was [played a major role in getting me to
> graduation]. How I was getting closer and closer. It was like a goal was
> there and I can see myself get closer to the goal and I wanted to finish.
> It's a big thing seeing that I'm knocking out those units. It's like whoa,
> not that much longer. I'm over 60%. My homeboy he graduated with a

degree in 5 years. And I'm like I gotta graduate. And I think I drove him and he drove me, my roommate. Let's get it. A little healthy competition. Wasn't nothing else. - Jake

I would say my work ethic, just being able to replicate that, not only in the classroom but on the football field. I would say that pretty much got me just that blue-collar mentality; work, work, work and it'll pay off. That helped me out the most, I would say. – Billy

Non-athletes tended to identify their biggest support systems as family and friends along with themselves as part of the support system. Family expectation played a role in how non-athletes looked at motivators to get forward. In comparison, athletes allowed the lack of parents and family knowledge and the fact that they had not had this experience to be a motivator to be the first who had graduated. Building on the ideas about self-support, it was further solidified when asking Black males about thoughts of quitting the experience altogether. Responses to this interview question was an overwhelming no. It was clear and certain for Black males that graduation would happen.

I knew I was going to finish. I knew I was gonna graduate. Not that I knew. That was a goal. That's what I was there for. I wasn't there to drop out, or for the social scene or to lollygag. I was in school for a reason. - Vance

Never crossed my mind once. I'm just looking forward to May 3rd. So never. Not at all. Pretty much what I want to do I know I need a college degree. There was never in my mind one time just to drop out because I wasn't doing too well. If anything, I was trying to seek help and within the organization I was allowed to seek help and network. - Tony

The variations in the responses were those that worked to acknowledge the struggle, the mishaps and the negative part of the experience while still ultimately knowing that graduation was inevitable. This is important to note because the struggles

and hurdles including those related to race are an inherent part of the persistence process

for Black males.

> I mean it's probably you feel distraught and you feel like it's like 'I'm not
> going to be able to do this.' It would feel like too much but I never just
> truly felt like I wasn't going to finish it ever, no. - Bernard

> When I first got here I hated it. I didn't feel like it was for me at all. I was
> coming from a 99 percent, inner-city school. I struggled academically as
> well so I didn't feel like I belonged here; I failed statistics but there's
> never been a time where I actually felt like I wouldn't get a degree— - it's
> just been a struggle throughout. A huge struggle. I actually can't let my
> parents see me without a degree. – John

In the cases where there were slight variations to the response, it was in situations that

had the potential to pose a threat to graduation but these participants made the conscious

effort to get things back in order. For athletes, their turning points were revealed when

their athlete identity was threatened by the status of a failing student identity. So, in

some cases, it was realized that although the student identity was secondary, that it was

needed to be ranked higher or renegotiated so that the athlete identity could survive.

> Before I had that moment where I came back my junior year, I, graduating
> was not a, wasn't a priority at the time. Sad to say. But again, like I said,
> I lived really to play football. I left, I transferred, and my whole goal was
> to play football. Because I loved football. My motivation for school, I
> wouldn't want to be super-motivated, but I wasn't going to be ineligible.
> So I did whatever I needed to do to get the job done in school. - Billy

For all the participants, the student identity was at the top of the identity hierarchy and

ranking.

Although not in direct relation to the research question, other data related to

personal meaning of achieving the graduation status reveals information that brings up

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issues of expectancy and support. The hopes of Black males to receive support once they have graduated were revealed when asked about feelings of being part of such an elite group of Black males who do persist to graduation. They expressed a want to be supported and accepted as individuals who were now capable of giving knowledge back to people in their communities and aid others to move forward. As I stated, although this is not directly related to support for developing identities during the experience, it is related to how support comes with an added layer of acceptance in the outcomes of this experience.

> What does it mean to me? It's an accomplishment, definitely. More so to me, I just, I really hope and plan it's just inspiring. I work with kids all the time, and especially kids in my city, and my whole method is, if I can do it, you can do it. - David

> A White person will be handing me my degree so you are even saying I am accepted now. Even if you don't accept me you have to hand me that paper. My paper don't say Black and the other don't say White. So we are all getting the same degree. I held on just like your favorite White people held on. To be a graduate means a lot not only to my family but to the fact that I can help someone else and I am not the same as African Americans you see on TV. I feel like I accomplished a lot. - Willie

> I think coming back to my community and then seeing that I am one of the only Black graduates is an eye opener. It's like wow. Not like more will go but just it's the reality and college isn't for everyone. It's not easy. Not everyone can go through it. - Tony

Many of these Black males talked about aspects of being an inspiration to others after graduation. Although it seems that support was not actively sought during the persistence experience, especially for athletes, it is interesting that the identities of Black males are negotiated and transformed to then become individuals who are the carriers of support and willing to aid those coming after them, offering any useful tips and inspiration for moving through the college experience.

In summary, the strongest sources of external support for these students come from friends and family, with friends being able to give an abundance of social support and family/parents only able to give minimal support due to lack of educational experience. Data revealed that campus authorities play a minimal role in providing access to support. There seems to be a lack of trust between those individuals available for potential support and Black males. This was one of the reasons Black males stated that they would have liked to see others who could be Black mentors, suggesting that there is more potential to trust other Black people who may share similar struggles. Overall, based on the data, although there were minimal attempts at seeking support as reported by Black males, when it was sought, if available, it was seen as a positive interaction that would aid them to move forward or resolve problems and consequently strengthen identities.

RQ4: According to Black male graduates, is the value of institutional support related to the development of identity during the PWI experience?

As noted earlier, the definitions of support appeared to be problematic for several reasons. To provide a sound analysis of the data, institutional support will be defined specifically as those programs and services the university is able to provide and which come directly from the efforts of the institution. So although such things as longer library hours will be considered what the institution provides as a form of support, it will also include adequate and sufficient faculty and administrators as a form of institutional support, while social and academic support as discussed in research question #3 are defined in terms of the actual communication acts and direct interactions of these individuals with students.

In relation to the Black male student population, it seems likely that support from the institution could influence their identity processes, and subsequently their persistence. A student's level of integration within the institution also plays a role in college success (Boulter, 2002). Assuming that institutional support is defined in whole or in part as the available means for a student to integrate within the university, the expectation is that some level of development will ensue from that support. However, research has not shown whether that integration and access to the resources of the university has any role in the development of identity. This research question aimed to understand whether the availability of institutional support in any form is related to identity development for Black males. And if there is some connection, which identities might this support be more important to and at what stage in the persistence process.

It was difficult to find in the data clear instances of institutional support as a motivator for identity processes and ultimately persistence to graduation. In the few instances related to the aforementioned definition of institutional support it was in terms of the lack of proper or adequate academic staff or personnel signaling loosely defined relationships between authority figures and Black males during persistence.

> The thing with advisors is you are limited to conversation with them because they are trying to get other students in. And with my major there are a lot of students. You are kind of limited so you can't always get your questions out and you have to make another appointment and when you get in it is not helpful. – Vance

This is not to say that institutional support was not present, but students did not seem to identify specific example of institutional support nor exactly where support comes from in relation to the organizational structure of the university. For example, Vance specifically stated that when he felt there was not adequate personnel to help him he

would revert to seeking academic support from friends, said that "for academic support I didn't know where to go, actually. They gave us a pre-major advisor who was my house dean and she wasn't really supportive at all. She just did not give good advice so I really didn't know who to turn to". John also later stated that he turned to his friends who had already gone through college to help him sort things out.

Thus, the data suggest that perhaps their lack of understanding about potential sources of institutional support turns students away from the university resources and toward individuals with whom they have stronger relationships. This understanding leads to a starting point in relation to the identity frames of CTI to interpret findings, specifically in the communal frame related to institutional support. The communal frame of identity refers to whether identity is shared as a group as in being or 'feeling' like a student is a part of the institutional community. A common bond to the group is illustrated by labeling, as students might try to define themselves as active members of the academic community. In this frame, students are following the norms of the institution and still trying to maintain other identities that are important to them. Communities define a repertoire of identities that are jointly held/remembered and taught to new members (Hecht et al., 2003). The data might suggest then, that the perceived lack of adequate institutional support leads to a potential strengthening of relational identities as student seek support on the social level as a consequence.

For groups with individualistic views and even more salient identities in the personal frame, the communal frame may contradict those views. Non-athletes in relation to institutional support take on individualistic views showing that social support is valuable in the personal frame. However, communal identities tend to transcend any

individual identity because they are norms handed down to new members (Hecht, et al, 2003).

> As far as campus support, I never really talked to any coaches about anything personal. Even though they were open to it and they told me they were, that's just giving more rocks to be thrown at you. To really divulge yourself to people, you never know how they are going to use it or take it. - Jake

Overall, data that were considered significant marks of the college experience support or otherwise, whether negative or positive, were not directly associated with the university but with the people who inhabit the PWI space. These accomplishments or perceived setbacks were related to the personal and relation levels of identity but not recognized on a macro level as related to the university itself.

Students respond positively to support as shown in previous retention research (Flowers, 2004; Burgette, 2009; Derby, 2006). The lack of clear and applicable forms of institutional support is significant to identity processes for Black males because it becomes a tool which navigates students away from the university goal of inclusion and overall support. It must be noted that many institutions do provide programs to support minority students but as the current research participants found, the programs are just not helpful for them:

> Colleges have initiated and developed a plethora of innovative programs, services, and environments all designed to help minority students succeed in college; however, they have spent far less time attending to the multicultural aspects of college life. Although American colleges and universities reflect upon more than thirty years of programming aimed at minority student retention, the success of their intentional efforts toward multiculturalism and acceptance of diversity is minimal at best (Watson, Terrell, Wright, Bonner II, Cuyjet, Gold, Rudy & Person, 2002)

Although university statements and mission goals highlight values of diversity, it

seems that the programs in place miss the mark on how effective their actual goals of diversity are, especially in the area of support. As Clark (2011) states, there are perhaps well meaning but ill-informed practices, which may unintentionally undermine diversity in higher education; there seems to be a trend toward eliminating focused diversity efforts in curricular and extra-curricular areas in the name of so-called integration. It seems that, in an effort to view student populations as one large group of individuals with similar backgrounds, interests and learning styles, diversity is pushed to the backburner and the actual needs of students are not addressed by the university. This leads to a question of the actual mission and goal statements of these universities as to whether these are statements of actual practice or just protocol. Based on the responses of this study it seems to be the latter.

Similarly, on the macro level, the same type of issue is represented in economic and law systems as discussed by critical race theorists. 'Think of how our system, applauds affording everyone equality of opportunity, but resists programs that assure equality of results.' (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Programming is implemented with the ill intent that individuals 'identify' with them rather than truly support their identities toward a goal of participation and benefit. Identity is much different from identification (Hecht et al, 2003). Colleges and universities invest a significant amount of time and money in formal academic-support services to improve student retention rates (Peach, 2005). Types of support on the PWI campus should be highlighted as an acknowledgement of identity processes which identify the communication of the student and the institution, and what is needed for the positive experience of the student, not what meets an agenda of the PWI. A lackluster effort at supporting students, identification and

such 'what is good for one is good for all' programming misses a beneficial opportunity within the PWI, "The more people of color morph into what the White American hegemony demands of us, the more we lose elements of our sense of authentic self" (Giles & Hughes, 2009, p. 693). The manner in which the real dynamics of race and ethnicity become 'hidden' in programming efforts allows those with the power of the programing effort to believe that race and ethnicity are optional identities when they are rather fixed (Waters, 2003). Such colorblind attempts at campus support takes away from the specificity and importance of cultural identity and actual student experience.

The previous sections have answered the four research questions to show that identity is, in fact, significant to the process of persistence. When Black males have a strong sense of self it turns out to be a tool for making decisions about how to navigate the hurdles that are encountered during the PWI experience. In the following chapter, the implications of these outcomes and their overall contribution to the knowledge in the field of communication in regards to identity and in education in regards to retention are discussed.

CHAPTER 6

Discussion and Summary of Findings

Previous research findings indicate that a lack of social support for Black students results in their feeling excluded from academic and social life, which leads to reduced participation in that life. These events are believed to negatively affect students' identity and, consequently, their persistence (White & Shelly, 1996). The current study offers a very different perspective regarding the role identity plays in the of retention of Black males; that is, it reveals that a lack of support and feeling excluded actually leads to a heightened sense of personal identity, which pushes these students forward to graduation. This chapter summarizes the major contributions of this research based on the findings and outcomes of each research question. In addition, this chapter provides a discussion of two types of implications of this research: policy implications for higher education and practical implications for those African American male students who will negotiate the PWI experience in the future. The final chapter presents an overall summary of the goals of the research and results for each of the research questions presented. It also states the strengths and limitations of this research with suggestions for future research.

Theoretical Contributions

Critical Race Theory. CRT, like many other broad theories, provides many vantage points for examining racially charged phenomena. In this case, it assisted in positioning the PWI as a place of social power deriving its impact from a larger society of racism and discrimination. When the institution and its participants enact this power, it characterizes how, why, and to what extent students will interact with the services provided by the institution. Institutions perpetuate power over social groups in ways that

become enacted and practiced by their own group members, which in this case includes other students, faculty, staff and administration of the PWI (Camara & Orbe, 2010). For the current study, CRT highlighted the existence of power relations and racial interaction by these Black males in various situations and helped to define and understand how they persisted toward successful graduation and free identity expression. The goals of CRT, as related to education, are to challenge conventional accounts of educational and social processes (Powers, 2007) and recognize interaction as it functions in the broad context of race relations and the outcomes that follow. The present study has confirmed that the identities of Black males must operate within a racialized campus context, and this context affects the ways that these students navigate the PWI campus and persist toward graduation. The racialized campus environment of PWIs is even more extreme in its negative impact on athletes, because the racial hostility is more pronounced toward Black athletes than other Black students. Perlmutter (2003) described the experiences of Black student athletes as including feelings of being marginalized and undervalued by their White professors in the classroom.

The threat of stereotypes was a main point of concern in this research. Massey and Fischer (2005) explain stereotype threat as a point where those being perceived stereotypically as less intelligent either internalize or externalize the stereotype, which become pathways to underachievement. Internalization happens when those being perceived stereotypically buy into the stereotype causing a reduction in academic effort. Externalization occurs when those perceived stereotypically become preoccupied with confirming the negative stereotype causing academic performance to become a burden (Owens & Massey, 2011). However, the Black males in this study did not seem to go

through either internalization or externalization, as described by Massey & Fischer (2005), since the outcome of those constructs is underachievement. However, participants did recognize the potential impact of stereotype threat in that they externalized and became preoccupied with trying to disprove stereotypes.

The classroom is only one sub context of the PWI where the stereotype threat may occur and affect graduation success. The campus itself poses its own issues, as do the surrounding neighborhood and communities. Taylor & Walton (2011) confirm that stereotype threat does, in fact, undermine the potential for academic learning for Black students. Furthermore, Black student athletes experience stereotype threat on two levels, or related to two identities simultaneously being performed. As Black individuals, athletes experience stereotype threat just as any other Black student does. As a Black *athlete*, academic stigma associated with being a student athlete, particularly at a highly selective college or university, is directly related to academic underperformance (Dee, 2014). Overall, many Black male students who participated in the present research project were aware of these stigma and were continuously vigilant about how their Black identity could lead them to potentially confirm the negative ideas outsiders had of them, of being underprepared and not academically capable.

Research conducted to assess faculty perceptions of the achievements of Black and White students showed that even upon successful accomplishment, Black students' intelligence is questioned (Comeaux, 2013). Proving other students and faculty wrong by doing well in coursework was one way these students acknowledged and resisted the threat of stereotypes and thereby challenged the dominant culture. However, it is likely that even after passing the courses with high grades, their intelligence could have still

been questioned in comparison to White counterparts whose intelligence is never questioned, as they are seen as 'wholly deserving of their accomplishments" (Comeaux, 2013, p. 460).

The results of this research as well as previous literature suggest that PWI administrators and faculty need to make changes to their approach to students of color--if they are truly interested in reducing the pressure students feel to perform resistance and allowing them to focus more on just being students. Classroom efforts by instructors that do not address potential for stereotype threat further shape the beliefs about Black students and confirm race-based perceptions of White individuals in the classroom and PWI campus. Aronson, Fried & Good (2002) attempt to counter the effects of stereotype threat by developing a protection against it through encouraging intelligence. Although at the surface level this acknowledges the impact and power of stereotype threats, it also reinforces the dominant paradigm with no push for change. According to CRT, recognizing and aiming for change, is the only way to help Black students thrive in the classroom and on the PWI campus.

The response behaviors of Black males on the PWI campus mirror similar ways in which Black males navigate the external context--which include non-confrontational strategies and adapting to inevitable racism and discrimination as well as awareness of restricted opportunities based on Black identity (Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry & Stanley, 2007). The implications of such outcomes asks that participants of the persistence process, institutions included, challenge the power structure, consider new ways to support Black males at PWIs and implement programs that ensure a more reasonable persistence experience comparable to that of their White counterparts.

Utilizing CRT in this research acknowledged the broader issues of inequality faced by Black students before they even enter the PWI context. Even before attending a PWI, respondents expected issues related to race to arise, which were confirmed by their accounts of actual racially charged identity interactions. It was revealed that micro-issues related to identity are fueled through inequality in the macro-issue of injustice and racism. The revealing of this outcome now suggests the utility of a critical pedagogical lens that epistemologically informs the various actors in the success of students, which mainly includes administrative boards in charge of constructing the opportunities provided in the campus experience. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2011) reported a growing number of African American males enrolled in college between 2001 and 2011. With a continuous increase in enrollment of this population, policies and efforts need to be in place to support the efforts of these students.

W.E.B. Dubois's stance in *The Souls of Black Folk* has been conceptualized in relation to CRT as stating that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line" (1989), and the sentiment has never been more true than in the 21st century. As this dissertation project shows, the color line impacts the experiences of identity processes for Black males in the context of the PWI. The color line *is* the hurdle that presents the need for persistence strategies. Essentially, it is a need for Black male students to strategize how to navigate the perceptions of race that will contextualize their interactions during their PWI experience. The color line is just that--a line that divides persistence experience based on race and as Orbe (1994) describes the lived experiences of African American males in connection to the racial divide, "it's always White's ball". Using a sports metaphor, he shows how Black struggle is the product of navigating the

possession of power by Whites in spaces where there is little room for negotiation. The uniqueness of these Black students experiences in the context of the PWI is that the color line may be invisible from the perspective of the White student, but for Black students it is visible and even expected well before the PWI experience begins. As CTI outlines and extensive research shows, the color line is a reality for Black men in the US in several distinct areas of society including education and careers (Cornelius, 2013). This research confirms that Black male students have been and continue to be victims of stereotypes in reference to their academic abilities and essentially their perceived ability to graduate.

The results of this project, examining issues of inequality through the experiences of Black male students, extends our knowledge on the specific ways in which CRT suggests that racism is real and impactful in the many facets of social life. The aim of CRT is not only to theorize about racial outcomes but to also identify race issues as ones that are prevalent and valid in the study of equality. The utility of such theories as CRT make clear that broader issues related to power, race, inequality and social injustice stand as a potential hindrance in many aspects of society for people of color and the results here show that the context of the PWI is no exception.

The interactions of Black males on PWI campuses described in this study detail how White privilege and power are relevant to the expression of identity. Continuing with the theme throughout this research to identify issues of identity in the periods before, during and after the PWI experience, it can be explained that this 'real' issue of race impacts the nature of potential interactions and therefore the expression of Black identity. When Black males described their interactions in classroom situations, they were not only subjected to negative cultural assumptions and stereotypes by professors

but also by other students. The issue of power comes into play again when we consider that those erroneous types of cultural assumption are based on perceived societal realities of Black people. Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Polio, Thomas & Thompson (2004) showed similar results in relation to Black students at PWIs where "Whites saw Blacks as a group and individually as less capable until proven otherwise" (p. 432). To prove themselves, Black students had to enact identity strategies to overcome stereotypes as if to just ignore them like they did not exist, because graduation was the greater goal.

The transformational nature of the outcomes of CRT analysis is groundbreaking and is able to reveal how Whites and Blacks perceive social realities and how to make society listen to the issues at hand for people of color. What is of significance to CRT in this case is the fact that race and race issues are ongoing and are deserving of attention, because they affect the persistence process and ultimately have potential to affect the likelihood of Black males to move on into further educational endeavors and career opportunities. Theorizing about the dominance and power of one culture over another is but to say that these issues are real and we need to understand this as a truth which moves knowledge and practice toward understanding potential for equality and better social interactions.

Overall, the macro context matters to the institutional experience of Black males. In understanding how the macro-context plays a role in these experiences and also the fact that race and race issues are ongoing, with no end in sight, we can understand just why those attempts at strategizing identity are important for Black males at PWIs. These findings align with recent scripts suggesting that Black males needing to be 'groomed' on how to interact in the presence of the dominant power and how to 'act' in public spaces

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in such a way that they are not perceived as threatening. Much of this grooming comes from the perceptions of racial identity in public spaces. According to Day (2006), men's experiences of being feared are shaped by their racial identities and by the meanings assigned to those identities. So that Black males are subjected to this understanding of inferiority first before they are evaluated as students. Subsequently, an evaluation of the student identity flows from the understanding of what one thinks about the interactions and potential interaction of the racial identity. The fact that discourses exist that state Blacks need scripts that teach how to navigate socially constructed meanings of how to act in public for no reason other than the fact that they are Black makes strategies become that much more important.

Co-Cultural Theory. As CRT plays a role in determining the extant and impactful nature of discrimination and racism in the macro context, co-cultural theory helps to contextualize what happens when we bring those realities from the macro context in and watch how interactions are enacted on the micro level. Previous research has found that Black students, as members of a co-cultural group, feel like they are sometimes not accepted culturally and are navigating between two worlds in educational contexts. For example, Brooks' (2012) interview study of high achieving Black students who attended PWIs confirms this idea and reveals a double consciousness in their navigation of their overall college experiences. The current research extends these findings to reveal the important role of black student identities in the double consciousness as they navigate successfully through the challenges encountered on the PWI campus.

Co-cultural theory (Orbe, 1998), grounded in standpoint theory and muted group

theory, has a main premise highlighting that less dominant cultural groups like Blacks communicate in such ways that are denotative of the power and hierarchical structure of the dominant society. Using this theory to understand the cultural starting points of Black college students as the less dominant group in relation to the PWI revealed how Black students understand their position upon experiencing college and how that position is enacted on the PWI campus. As this research indicates, successful Black students must be able to navigate between worlds familiar and unfamiliar to them, to be able to be competent in all interactions presented in the PWI context, given the power imbalances African American males experience in the classroom as well as on the larger PWI campus (Glenn & Johnson, 2012).

Co-cultural theory states that communication is not static. It is rather a fluid process of negotiation of power and identity between co-cultural group members and dominant group members. Co-cultural theory proposes that co-cultural groups have three possible modes of interacting with the dominant cultural group (assimilation, accommodation, and separation). Each mode has corresponding benefits and challenges. The popular persistence model of Tinto (1993), which essentially asks that students leave behind their cultural understandings in order to blend in with the new community, is promoting the assimilation mode. However, co-cultural theory suggests that assimilation to the dominant (white) group may have its own downside (e.g., alienation from one's own cultural group, increased psychological stress). Rather, success for Black students may be to maintain a sense of power within their own ethnic/racial communities by exuding a clear sense of ethnic and racial and personal identity. Further, results here suggest that persistence success may mean acknowledging a reciprocal relationship with

the larger Black community, attributing many of their student successes to the membership in the Black racial group and rewarding the group in return. It seems, then, that these Black males' successful adaptation strategies are not assimilating, but a constant negotiation of identities and power relations. In addition, the students did enact some accommodation strategies, as described by Orbe (1998), e.g., in their manipulating stereotypes. The students exhibited this accommodation strategy by dressing in ways that were less likely to be associated with stereotypical Black appearance.

However, as identities are fluid and overlapping, there can be points of contradiction and negotiation, as will be detailed in the discussion of CTI below. For example, a personal identity of being Black can continuously contradict a communal student identity when it becomes hard to immerse one's self into the university structure due to negative perceptions and difficulty fitting in. With the contradiction between the personal and communal identity, students can become stressed by the constant negotiation just trying to fit in with their peers and PWI. It is at this point that the points of CTI and co-cultural theories converge. Given that the claim and existence of a Black identity has been considered highly political, the meaning of that identity in the macro context as described by CRT will most certainly influence one's experience in the micro context as a student as described by co-cultural theory.

Communication Theory of Identity (CTI). While the previous two theories address the contextual realities of the PWI experience, CTI addressed the interconnectedness of communication, identity, culture and power on the PWI campus as it reveals that identity is relevant to persistence in many ways and for that reason is also related to retention. In understanding these issues as they relate to Black male students at

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PWIs, student retention becomes an issue of how institutions can consider identity processes when creating spaces that are supposed to be welcoming and supportive of their growing population of Black students. In doing so, students can appropriately navigate the matriculation process and can potentially find spaces to enact their true Black student identities with potentially less contradiction. The issue of retention will be revisited later with a more in depth discussion of how it specifically relates to persistence for these students

CTI identified the use of the communication process in terms of specific identities during the persistence process for Black males. Black student identity was an integral part of the communication process between students and the other participants at the PWI. The current study provided the opportunity to understand that identity is not just a label but a communicative act that is manipulated and used to navigate the PWI campus toward a goal of graduation by Black males. CTI identifies four layers or frames of identity, which are personal, enacted, relational and communal which refer to the four (overlapping) loci where identity resides (Hecht et al., 2005). These frames are important for many reasons and knowing when the frames are useful can be crucial to the institution planning process and the success of Black males graduating since it allows us to see how the external world connects to the act of identity negotiation on the college campus.

CTI states that the four frames of identity are interpenetrated by each individual and cannot exist apart from one another. The experiences of Black males illustrates this process as black males in their negotiation efforts navigated by reordering identities, focusing on those that were most appropriate for the particular situation they found themselves in. In applying the relevant identities to each of the four frames of CTI, it

was difficult as a researcher to isolate one identity in the analysis of the full persistence experience. To be able to consider a personal identity for each of the Black males, for example, it must also be considered just how salient his Black identity is and also how salient the connection to the Black community is for each individual.

As CTI suggests, identity negotiation is always a process of communication between self and others, and this process is seen clearly in this study. That is, during the persistence process, identity negotiation happens partly because perceptions of others along with their own self perceptions seem to cause Black males to reorder and re-rank their identities in order to successfully meet the demands of any current situation and not cause any tension; that is, to reorder and present the identity that best counters perceptions from the dominant power. However, this can often involve contradictions between enacted and other frames (contradiction seemed to be a constant theme in Black male student identity expression). For example, when asked about significant moments that marked their academic career, Black males reflected on negative and positive experiences. In all of the negative experiences, the ethnic/racial identity of being Black was always the reason given for why they felt they were treated certain ways on the PWI, which illustrates that Black communal identity affects relational identity. Also, a student may find his enacted ethnic identity as a Black student is in tension with his overall communal identity as a student, which does not allow for a smooth integration with other non-Black students of the PWI.

These four frames permeate all understanding of identity, and may be considered individually, in pairs, or groups (Hecht et al., 2003). Individually, it must be considered what it means to be a Black student to be able to understand the contradiction of

experience when contrasted with a communal student identity. In this case, if one's

Black identity is in tension with the PWI campus, and one experiences social issues such

as stereotypes, discrimination and racism, identity issues become an even larger issue

given that the student identity holds a level of commitment to the PWI campus. This

causes the communication of multiple identities simultaneously (Black, a student, a Black

student, a male, athlete, etc.) to be contradictory, which causes conflict and discomfort

with the context and confirms previous theorized attempts at explicating the complexity

of lived experience for Black males on PWI campuses.

It seems important that the interpretation of these experiences of Black males on

PWI campuses be paid special attention to because of all of the nuances and possible

contradictions that could hinder Black students from attaining their goal of graduation.

Frames are means of interpreting reality that provide a perspective for understanding the

social world. The use of these frames in this research indicates the level of involvement

Black males have with the institution and its participants, thus providing a way to

examine/view identity data from several different angles. While it is greatly beneficial to

focus on the personal frame of identity, since this is the frame where much of the identity

work of Black students comes from, a more complete analysis would examine the frames

two at a time, three at a time, and/or all four at a time (Jung & Hecht, 2004). The

outcomes of this research show just how the multiple frame analysis provides beneficial

outcomes.

In the personal frame, Black students identify an individual identity for

themselves. The personal identity was shown to be a very strong identity in the data. This

identity was most salient during the persistence process for Black males who graduated

holding a very dynamic quality. This was the identity that had a very significant influence on whether Black males graduated. The participants of this research held strong beliefs and a high sense of self, which was highly influential in making graduation, a reality despite minimal sources of support. So although previous research has shown that a lack of support leads to students feeling excluded and eventually reduced participation, the current research shows that a lack of support leads these Black males to focus on their personal identity, to define and motivate them for the duration of the persistence process. All of the Black males interviewed for this research expressed a high degree of confidence in graduation, throughout the process, never thinking it would not be possible. They showed a strong sense of self through this personal identity. This particular identity occurs on the individual level and stays with the individual and it was indeed something that stayed with Black males and moved them to graduation. It is not attached to any type of group membership and had potential to change over time but the data revealed that for Black males it remained constant throughout for non-athletes and for athletes, once they were aligned on the path to graduation, it became a source of strength. Future retention studies could tease out ways an institution might provide support to students in the areas of self-development, focused on the personal identity, that fosters an outlook toward graduation.

In the enactment frame, identity is enacted in communication through messages (Hecht et al., 2005). This enactment frame implies that Black males perform their identities through communication on the PWI campus, often dealing with racial issues. Not all messages are about identity, but identity is part of all messages (Hecht, et al., 2003). Double consciousness plays a role in this frame because as Black male students

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consider external perceptions they must also figure out how to enact an identity that is non-threatening in the context. Although other identities were also communicated by Black males, the Black identity was one that was simultaneously enacted while other identities were in play, and seemed not possible to separate one's self from the racial identity. While White students are able to maintain a dominant position where their race is the norm, they are able to communicate their identities as just students. However, Black students cannot be 'just a student' based on the social construction of race the option for Black males is to be a Black student.

If PWI administration can understand the range and possibility of Black student identities and the place of power and perception in the persistence process, they might be better able to support Black males. PWIs could create spaces for students to creatively and more authentically enact themselves academically as well as socially. In contrast to integration literature, a relational approach to the enacted identity would suggest that institutions provide more African American faculty and mentors which could potentially allow Black students to bypass the hurdle of double consciousness involved in identity work, at least in interactions with faculty and mentors Black students can trust and feel genuine support from.

Building on the potential for communication in the enacted frame, in the relational frame, identity is considered in relation to another's perspective and identity is used as mutual property. The issue with relational identity in this research is that if identity is mutual property, and perception plays a role in how Black male students are approached, then the overall existence of a relational identity is a constant negotiation of

perception. Identity in this frame reflects the perception of both communicators. In connection to retention literature and student perception, this is very important.

Previous research has found that Black students feel the need to maintain identities that express/demonstrate their membership and connection to their families and those associated with school. Integration models about minority students' retention maintain that to be successful, a student must choose between the two identities. However, this research suggests that this is a false dichotomy, that this relational frame cannot be considered without the enacted layer (Hecht, Jackson & Ribeau, 2003) hence making and maintaining connections with the people who support these Black males is very important to their persistence process. In the enacted frame Black males are communicating an identity and in the relational frame, another identity is constructed depending on the relational dynamics of the participants. Black males want to show themselves as honoring connections with friends and family through their enacted interactions; however, with minimal opportunities for interaction with other students who are Black, it seems likely that those on-campus interactions will continue to be difficult, fraught with the task of negotiating between a double consciousness.

Although analysis was useful in understanding how all four frames are connected to the data, one difficulty with the analysis of data related to the enacted frame was in trying to understand the clear dividing line between the relational identity and the enacted identity. My outcome related to this frame was similar to Witteborn's (2004) claim that the enacted frame should be reconsidered because it can be a part of each of the personal, relational and communal identities (since enactment is to communicate through verbal and nonverbal means). However, the current research finds clear separations of a

personal identity, relational identity and communal identity in that all of these areas are clear and straightforward to the given definitions. The theory states that the relational frames cannot be considered without the enactment frame. Study findings challenge the theory to state that the relational frame has a subset of identity characteristics which can be described through the enactment frame leaving the overall model to have three frames, personal, relational and communal, not four. Using an enactment frame as a subset of the relational frame provides a more systematic way of acknowledging the relationships one honors through the relational frame as well as the behaviors are associated with those relational identities. Findings also allow researchers to contend that the problem is not that enactment can be a part of all frames but that enactment highlights the use of a relational frame and one's behaviors when in the relational frame.

The communal frame had a significant influence on the ways that Black males navigated the PWI campus. The communal identities that were relevant to the persistence experience were the Black identity and the student identity. In both of these cases, Black students were considered members of a larger group in which they held membership. In the Black community, Black males were considered representatives. In the campus community, Black males are considered members of the larger student community. However, there were many instances where the Black males felt that their membership status as students was not honored. The common bond that a communal identity gives to the members of the group through labeling was not extended to Black students. This identity was another area where Black students had to negotiate power with the dominant culture and prove their legitimate membership status as students. In maintaining a communal identity on the PWI campus Black males attempted to define themselves as

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active members of the academic community through classroom participation as well as participation in public campus spaces. However, this became an arduous task when they tried to follow the student norms of the institution while still trying to maintain other identities that were important to them, e.g. their Black identity. Communities define a repertoire of identities that are jointly held/remembered and taught to new members (Hecht et al., 2003). In the PWI academic community, Black members were taught through orientation activities and social integration to act in the interest of the institution but in many cases that meant downplaying other important cultural identities that came in the expression of appearance and speaking. However, at some points, the personal and communal frames were in contradictions. This was true for Black males who held the personal identity derived from Black community membership in high regard, as it was used as a tool to get to graduation, but it was in conflict at times with the communal student identity. As stated by the tenets of CTI, communal identities transcend any individual identity meaning Black males will be held to the perceptions of the group no matter how strong the personal identity is; namely that their identity is that they were always seen by others as Black males, first and foremost.

Together, the use of CRT, Co-cultural theory and CTI provided a sound basis for the undertaking of the current study. Overall, the knowledge of Black male experiences on PWI campuses has been extended to understand how we might approach such persistence situations in relation to retention, identity and support. Moreover, we can now see the complexity of experiences for Black males who graduate and how identity processes are largely intertwined in the execution of social life for these individuals on the PWI campus.

The integration of these three theories has further opened the discussion of the role of other participants, beyond the Black males, in ensuring their success in the PWI experience. Although much of the praise for successful persistence goes to the participants of this research, it leaves questions to be answered about why Black males have to be bearers of such a heavy load when a large part of retention and persistence is about creating a supportive system for students to thrive in. Research findings posit that students' ability to develop meaningful connections affects their successful adaptation to college (Gray, Vitak, Easton & Ellison, 2013). For Black males those connections could help them get to graduation with a lighter load. However, taking such a load off a student could give them extra time and effort to pour into other areas of persistence like academic studying. With this understanding comes a much-needed discussion of the roles of society, families, authority figures and institutions in this process of persistence for Black males. Given the racial context of oppressive and dominant ideals presented by the PWI it becomes a difficult task to build meaningful connections which contribute to a beneficial system for Black males.

Policy and Practical Implications

Implications for Retention Strategy. The discussion of CRT began the conversation for developing a critical consciousness for the issues that arise for Black males on PWI campuses related to identities. Viewing culture as a theoretical framework for defining identity aids in identifying the place where issues arise for Black males in the PWI context (Tierney, 1999). CRT also presents a foundation for understanding how identity should be considered in university efforts in implementing retention strategies because the process of identity development is influenced by a larger social paradigm of

racism.

The results of this dissertation study suggest that universities, particularly PWIs, need to take better care of students and their identities and acknowledge upfront that there is a significant social force that works against Black students. Working from this as a starting point can ensure that these students are the ones being served through programs rather than the 'perceived' student who may or may not even exist at any given time. "The development of any program at any university requires a multifaceted process incorporating all individuals involved" (Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003, p. 114). This process of retaining students is not only about students and their efforts but also about acknowledging the efforts of the institution as well as the situational implications of the broader racial context; "Not only must students fit into the academic culture, but educational organizations must also accommodate for and honor students' cultural differences" (Tierney, 1999, p. 83). The experiences of Black males at PWI campuses who participated in this study indicate that this statement still rings true today.

Hughes & Giles (2010) describe the ongoing scholarly dialogue addressing the intersections of race, privilege, power in several social contexts. One of these contexts, and relevant to the current study, is that of power to the emergence, negotiation, and management of Black student identities at PWIs. It would seem, from these research results that some university programs take a one-size-fits-all approach to providing institutional support to minority students rather than truly making the effort to acknowledge that communities of color function in different ways than dominant communities.

This particular research study wishes to encourage students and institutions to challenge racial domination as well as elicit and honor the true feelings of Black students as they situate themselves in the PWI context through identity processes. This can prove to be a useful epistemological and pedagogical device for higher education policy and programming officials interested in creating better retention strategies for their Black populations. The critical perspective of this work offered suggestion through a process of idealistic scholarship to create more tangible and materialistic outcomes.

This research recognizes the power structure imposed on students in PWIs. The experience of becoming a student in a predominantly White context means that levels of power have been predetermined and where the historic nature of inequality and injustice is played out in overt and covert ways. The current research has the potential as a critical pedagogical tool to motivate higher education institutions to consider persistence with a critical consciousness for acknowledging and understanding difference in student populations and the need for a better understanding of scholastic and academic meanings of equal access which move all toward more equitable outcomes

Significance of Support for Students on the University Campus. The issue of support is heavily discussed in the Black student retention literature. Black students in PWIs seek support from a number of sources including peers as well as staff and administration. There are three types of support on the college campus, overall: institutional support, social support and academic support. When these types of support are available and appropriate, it communicates acceptance of the student and the student's identities. Unfortunately, as Black students, when institutional support is lacking it seems to redirect Black students to gain social support from others to help them

through tough times. This usually goes back to the Black communal identity where students seek support in others who look like them. Based on the data, support was relevant to the persistence process in the following ways.

First, support came through the relational frame as indications of students seeking social support through the relationships they had. Other areas of support included the potential to join groups and clubs on campus. Joining groups and clubs can be classified as both institutional support and social support. As institutional support, the college/university provides the infrastructure and facilities for the creation of groups that students can join on campus. On the social level, once a club is in place, the advisors and authority figures along with other student members provide a local level of support once a student has joined the club.

Chavous (2000) found that students who came from neighborhoods with fewer African Americans were more likely to join campus groups and organizations that were non-African American. This is one way of explaining Tinto's (1993) heavily used and scrutinized model of student attrition and retention which states that if students integrate themselves with the university leaving behind the neighborhoods they came from, they are more likely to successfully and comfortably persist. If Black students are exposed to racially heterogeneous communities, they are more likely to assimilate based on the fact that they have learned skills to work with and interact with non-African Americans and are leaving behind a community similar to the one they are moving toward. However, the reality is many Black students are leaving behind strong cultural ties and moving toward entirely new communities, making support a useful tool to aid the transition (Sobré-Denton, 2011).

Second, students indicated that support in the form of Black role models and mentoring for Black students was lacking, but this lack did not seem to completely hinder their performance, or ultimately keep them from graduation. Support has been shown in previous research (Thompson & Mazer, 2009) as a positive predictor of academic success. Based on the current research findings, support can be a tool to lessen the mental and physical persistence load for Black males and would be considered supplemental to the already strong personal identity, which was the main motivator toward graduation. Persistence was viewed an experience involving inevitable racial hurdles, but where student most heavily relied on themselves to endure and persist to graduation, and then to become role models for others who came after them.

Institutional support, in the form of programs which directly acknowledge the identity and needs of Black students, have shown to be effective; specifically, when programs are provided that allow students to express their cultural identities in safe spaces, Blacks will have more academic success overall (Allen & Smith, 2008). When students are provided with a framework of linked struggle, students can identify with other people who are experiencing similar things on the college campus (Grier-Reed et al., 2008). Having more programs with more faculty and staff who are Black could provide Black students with a sense of belonging, in support of their cultural identity. In this view, student needs become an important factor for understanding retention and the possible solutions that directly address the quality of the Black student experience. This point of limited interaction challenges many universities that use such words as cultural diversity as a selling point in their recruitment process.

Third, data did not reveal whether Black males of this research came from racially homogenous neighborhoods but it did reveal that they come from an ideological place where communal identities are held close, so figuratively they negotiate identity by navigating between the communal identity of Blackness to a new communal identity of college student, which poses itself as a racial incompatibility in the context of the PWI. When group involvement follows the idea that Black students are interested heavily in their role of membership dictated by the communal identity, support becomes another way of being involved to uplift the community as well as the personal self. Harper & Quaye (2007) found that whether Black students were interested in mainstream campus organizations or Black and minority student organizations, when involved with the culturally relevant organization a common goal of Black students was to uplift the African American community. This can be seen as contributing to cultural capital and advancing the community.

In summary, several types of (appropriate) support can work together as a positive and supplemental addition to the black student experience. Academic support can come from the institution itself or from other external sources in connection with the college experience. Research shows that the creation of a safe space by the university is a form of supporting the college experience of its students by fostering a sense of belonging (Jehangir, 2009). Social support can come in the form of programs provided by the institution and people students actively interact with. Although there is a component of support provided through student support services by the university, Thompson (2008) found that more than half of students surveyed did not use formal school support services, which is consistent with the findings of this research. In most cases black males

felt that they were either not needed or did not add anything to their experience. Social support can also come from peers and family. Peer support is an important and integral part of the student experience on the college level (Thompson & Mazer, 2009). In cases of family support there is always a chance that family may not be as supportive as expected. For example, family members of first-generation college students cannot provide support based on previous college experiences. In some cases, family members do not know how to support the experience. Overall, student retention research suggests that the more supportive connections a student can develop, the more they will succeed academically and socially (Thompson & Mazer, 2009). For Black males supportive connections could alleviate the potential stress caused by taking on the task of persistence with the expectation that they will have to navigate the inevitable hurdles alone.

Based on the data, racism and discrimination were expected occurrences for both athletes and non-athletes. These issues can be seen as unnecessary but inevitable obstacles in the persistence process and should be combatted with some clear forms of support. Watkins, Green, Goodson & Guidry (2007) document the stressors of Black males in college which included concerns of carrying the weight of other Black students, not falling into the stereotypes and not acting too White or too Black. It is clear the race produces a huge issue for Black male college students. Participants of this research as a whole expressed a knowing expectation of the existence of race as an issue as well as a knowing idea that it is something that cannot be gotten rid of. This opens a space for a much needed discussion of how to support students to aid in getting past and who associated with the persistence process has influence to aid in getting past these types of issues that can potentially deter Black males from attending college altogether. Curry

and Gear (1990) reported that PWIs have failed at efforts to combat Black student perceptions of hostile environments and feelings of campus incompatibility based on race. The data reveals again and again a need for the institution to effectively step in toward supportive change.

   Practical Implications for Black Students at PWIs. Identity is a very relevant issue in the study of Black male persistence. Based on the experiences of these students, identity played a significant role in helping to get to graduation. Based on the frames presented by CTI, the personal frame showed to be more significantly influential than others were toward an end of graduation. It can be concluded that identity processes have a direct influence on whether Black males at PWIs make it to graduation or not. Black males saw graduation as an event and as a goal and decisions made on the PWI campus are a part of an overall goal to make it to the event of graduation. It was first postulated that a lack of support posed a role of affecting student persistence toward not graduating. The data of this research shows it to be otherwise. In terms of support, Black males received support from parents, friends and sometimes campus associations. However, the most salient interactions to make goal oriented decisions were indicated by the ordering and negotiating of the frames of identities and also creating strategies to overcome issues which could possibly be a hindrance to graduating. Black males who had a strong sense of self and who had a clear goal in mind executed these strategies more effectively.

   From the aforementioned findings, some strong themes were illustrated which lead to a much needed discussion of the key implications presented by those themes. I will also discuss how they relate to the entire moment of persistence-before, during and after below by looking at identity negotiation as a skill (in addition to a strategy); based

on this research we can focus on being able to teach Black males before they enter the

PWI context what is needed psychologically. Knowing that identity plays a role in the

persistence process for Black males suggests that it (identity) should be a primary focus

in policy and practical application of college preparation for groups who struggle or

encounter obstacles during the persistence process. Second, looking at graduation as a

communal event well before the persistence process begins could help students

understand the significance of it when it becomes a reality. Next, understanding the need

for strategies during the persistence process that make the PWI experiences more pleasant

and tolerable rather than a series of obstacles could prove to be useful to enhance the

overall experience for Black males during and after. Finally, since the personal frame of

identity proved to be the one that that was most significant to the persistence process and

ultimately the goal of graduation, it may be a good practice to also develop ways for

Black men to strengthen their personal identity in ways that will be useful to persisting

and graduating before, during and after the PWI experience.

      A Need for Persistence [Race] Strategy. The expression of Black male cultural

identities played a significant role in decisions to persist, with departure being far from

the minds of Black males who had strong sense of their personal identity and clear goals.

Due to the multidimensional nature of identity, identity played a role in how students

approached situations with both potential and negative consequences on the PWI campus

based on who they believe they are and how that identity is enacted and constrained by

the space. One example of this is in an incident where a Black male along with some of

his friends were discriminated against for no reason other than being Black, and racial

epithets were spewed at them while they walking through a surrounding residential area

close to the university. In cases like these, Black males used strategies to overcome and potentially avoid the situation as much as possible while also coaching others to see the bigger picture of being a student and graduating. Based on the data of this research along with the predictions of CRT and Co-Cultural theory, race issues between Blacks and Whites are inevitable. American society controls the nature of contact between Blacks and Whites (Jarmon, 2013). As Blacks tend to organize their identities around the interest of the dominant power they admit to the reality of this racial hierarchy here in America, and also know that Blacks are fighting an ongoing and losing battle.

While it was not clear which strategies were the most significantly useful, it was clear that avoiding these negative situations as much as possible or being more in control of the situations by 'appearing' as non-threatening as possible were used as a means of getting through it and getting to the next obstacle. Since many Black males admitted that race issues would be inevitable and also some of the largest hurdles during the persistence experience, it must be assumed that using a strategy to get through one situation would only be a precursor to other issues related to race. The race interactions in this context, known as microaggressions (Henfield, 2011) where Black students are intentionally or unintentionally slighted through microassualts, microinsults, or microinvalidations, are ones that Black males begin to experience well before the experience at a PWI. The practice of demonizing African Americans dates back to the period of the slave trade and has endured despite the reelection of America's first African American president (Brown, 2013). Although as seen by some as an indication of post-racial American there is much recent evidence to counteract that belief (e.g. the incident

and aftermath surrounding the killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed teenager in

Ferguson, Missouri in the summer of 2014, and many other similar incidents).

The ways in which Black males deal with these racial incidents on the PWI

campus is one of the major findings of this research. They seemed to know it was

necessary to keep focused on the goal of graduation and that one must have a strategy for

'staying in the game'. Having a sense of pride was a theme that characterized many of

the responses and in three specific instances Black males were able to speak of their

pride. One was to have pride in being Black despite the racial issues one would come

across. So the act of strategizing is not only one to stay in the game but also one to hold

onto the pride of the race despite the treatment of its people. With another major finding

of this research being to expect issues that arise due to being Black in this context, it

shows a need and justification for strategies to stay afloat and get to the goal of

graduation. The question now becomes how can institutions become a part of this

conversation and actively accommodate the inevitability of this issue that has potential to

isolate the Black male during his PWI experience? Answers to this question can be used

as a guide to pass along and let others know of strategies to graduate. In line with notions

of pride and excellence, it should follow that when you stay in the game and focused on

the goal of graduation and make up in your mind that nothing could be a hindrance, the

persistence experience is something that is realistic for those Black males enrolled.

Developing a Strong Personal Identity. Previous research identified issues like

lack of resources and institutional support (Feagin, Vera & Imani, 1996) as well as

exclusionary practices through covert barriers encountered during the persistence process

by Black students (Massey, 2006). The current study adds to these findings by showing

that the issues identified do not have to be hindrances to graduation when a strong sense of self is paired with a clear goal. Consistent with Keels (2013) assertion of institutional efforts there should be an effort to create areas for Black males to develop supportive social communities that are particularly focused on emotional and physiological resources proven to increase postsecondary success. The current study pinpoints the function of the personal frame of identity as something that has a direct effect on the decisions of Black males to make it to graduation. When Black males had a strong sense of self, they were able to discern the clear goal and associate the tandem nature between goal, self, and strategy.

Unfortunately Black males throughout history have always had to be ever so cognizant of their identities and behaviors in social interactions due to perceptions perpetrated by the dominant culture of Whiteness. Mays (1986) stated that Black people develop within a culture that teaches that all their behaviors, beliefs, and characteristics are inferior, maladjusted, and inadequate. In 2014, this still holds true. Just the acknowledgement that Blacks need a strategy to navigate racial issues admits to this claim where the mere act of being Black is considered to the dominant culture inadequate to inhabit the PWI context and the nature of creating barriers shows how Black must prove their way out of a perception of inferiority, making graduation a profound act of resistance. Beyond any negative thought of what Black males can achieve and resisting not at the site of production (Anderson, 1996) but at the site of reproduction as those perceptions linger from the external context as described by CRT. This resistance is happening at the site of reproduction and a site of potential flourishing at the PWI campus. In this research the overall identity negotiations that fueled strategies toward

graduation are similar to the auto ethnographic study by Waymer (2008) that found Black

males "construct their identities in contrast to, in resistance to, and in accommodation to

White privilege" (p. 977). As outlined by CRT and the data of this research, Whites do

not see their position as perspective but as a matter of fact (Taylor, 1998). Any

negotiations and identity ranking done by Black males on the PWI campus is due to the

position of perceived and apparent White viewpoints. Essentially, to be a successful

Black male on the PWI campus, one must be cognizant of the White perspective, and to

be able to navigate around it. Overall, on the PWI campus, the White viewpoint is a

hurdle in itself. Black males stated a clear recognition that the race hurdle was one

between the Black student and White viewpoints, vantage points and positions.

Personal identity in this research was characterized by a strong sense of self, high

self-esteem and high level of confidence. These three attributes together were used as a

tool, which is a consequence of strong and positive personal identity to rely on which

pushed them toward graduation. Goldie (2012) refers to the sense of self as it relates to

the classification of the personal identity in this research as the narrative sense of self.

This is defined as a way of thinking of oneself, or of other, in narrative thinking as having

a past, present and future. Black males thought of themselves in great terms despite what

they felt could have worked against them, and went into the persistence process with that

attitude. In this same narrative sense of self, one is able to think in terms of how you, as

a character, are placed into the settings of the environments. Narrative sense of self is

intricately involved in the way we engage with and think of our present environment

(Goldie, 2012). So as Black males reflected on past experience, talked about their present

situation and had expectations for the future, they used a narrative sense of their personal

identity to vividly see themselves as real actors who succeed toward a goal of graduation. Having a narrative sense of self is a valuable process as Goldie (2012) states and is shown in how Black males keep a focus on the goal by placing themselves in scenes which include real life events and outcomes.

      Clear Goals: Graduation as Event From the Student Perspective. One of the key differences in this research and many other similar research reports is that this one was interested in understanding the voices of Black males who had already persisted and graduated. This is not to say that in previous research those studied did not graduate rather that graduation was not a focal point in recruiting study participants. Based on the data, and the previous mention of Black males with such strong personal identities that helped them to get to graduation, it was revealed that graduation for these males had to have become apparent at some point. For athletes, although their initial reasons for attending college was to play sports, once the student identity became a salient one, graduation became important. This analogy elucidates that in their initial phases at a PWI, athletes are to playing sports as students are to graduating. Committing oneself to being a student is essential to Black males when graduation is apparent and real. From the data I did not find this from the athlete identity.

      So overall being a student is important and became another of the important identities in relation to persistence. In the personal frame one must see himself as a student, which also allows him to see himself as a potential graduate. In a comparison study evaluating graduation rates of athletes to those of non-athletes, Eckard (2010) found that football and basketball players graduate at rates significantly lower relative to the general full-time student body. This could be due to the lack of focus on the student

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identity. With focus being on being a student, the goal becomes the highest student achievement from that campus, which is graduation itself.

Identity Management as a Skill. Overall, looking at graduation as an event, being able to strategize racial issues during the persistence process and developing a strong personal identity are all acts related to identity negotiation. In understanding identity competence in cultural situations, one must be able to express a certain level of identity management skills, which guide them through these situations. The overall goal in all of these is face-saving as many Black males expressed a desire to be looked at in a positive light when external perceptions would only attach individual behaviors back to their communal identity. Also, with having their own attachments to communal identities, Black males were interested in face saving strategies that ultimately would lead them into being sources of support for others after them. In this view as well, graduation become a face-saving act as well. Knowing how to manage identities and apply them to contexts in a manner that moves one toward achieving an important goal is certainly a skill. Identity is not just something we do or communicate, it is a vehicle that gets us from point A to B when we are able to find satisfying outlets and forms of communication which connect you to the environment and show the potential for satisfying outcomes in that environment.

Skill sets are tools for interacting in any given context. When identity management and negotiation is looked at as a skill, it can then be seen how competency is essential to maintaining student status, saving face, remaining confident and ultimately building personal identity. With such task placed on identity, there should be some form of support on campuses that directly highlight the need for this skill set and as well as

clear and direct ways of measuring how to implement and assess its use in connection with academic goals.

This section has evaluated and explored the implications and outcomes of the study data. The most profound outcome suggested by the data is that identity is very relevant to the overall persistence experience during the periods before, during and after persistence. Theories used for this research study provided a sound baseline for understanding the specific interaction of Black males in the PWI context and confirm that race matters. And for Black male students, race becomes a hurdle that cannot be eliminated from the experience, only navigated. For this reason, the data suggest that to overcome the hurdles Black males should enter the persistence experience with a strategy specifically geared toward graduation. The data also suggest that just being enrolled is not enough; Black males must look toward graduation as a goal. Having a strategy for graduation gives strength to the student identity keeping it continuously relevant to the persistence experience.

Along with a strategy the personal identity played a huge role in getting Black males to graduation. Black males also need to have strong levels of confidence to overcome the inevitable issues that their race will produce. In contrast to previous research findings that indicated intelligence counters the stereotype threat, the current study suggests that there is no actual counter to stereotype threat due to the influence of Black identity on everyday experience. The more useful response for Black males should be to find strategies of identity management that allow Black students to maintain their Black identities in ways that they are culturally and personally satisfying.

CHAPTER 7

Summary and Conclusions

This research study was conducted to explore the experiences of first generation, Black males who attended PWIs and graduated within the last 10 years or were ready to graduate within the following year. It specifically investigated whether identity played a significant role in interviewees' persistence experiences, and if so, to what extent identity is directly related to the likelihood that a Black male student will reach graduation. This chapter provides an overview of the entire research project to include a brief summary of results for each research question and also discusses the strengths and limitations of the research and directions for future research.

Summary of Results

RQ1: *What are the expectations of Black male students before, during and after the PWI persistence process?*?

As described in chapter four, the data analysis revealed six major findings: first, in the period before the PWI experience began, Black males relied on external scripts from family and friends about the value of obtaining a college degree to see them through the experience of deciding whether to attend college. However, they received minimal advice and support regarding the academic experience from parents and friends beyond the suggestion that attendance was beneficial. Ultimately it was the strong commitment of the students to make a better life for themselves that lead to their success. In the period during persistence, Black males reported experiencing myriad of what can only be described as hurdles related to race and outsider perceptions of race that could have hindered their persistence to graduation.

In the period after graduation, Black males were proud of their accomplishments and expected that they would become 'experts' on the college experience. This was a proud moment for them. They saw graduation as useful not only to themselves but to their communities. The persistence experience as well as the degree itself allowed participants to feel they had acquired important cultural capital (Tierney, 1999), which would reflect well on them and be acknowledged as an accomplishment for the individual and the community. Black males also expected that having a degree would offer the potential for a better life, and now they could understand how close they were to this goal. Many of the Black males who participated in this study had already started graduate programs and/or careers.

Second, the PWI experience was, overall, expected to be a positive experience because it was beneficial to personal and academic growth. The negative experiences experience by Black males in this context were often viewed as hurdles, but ultimately these events allowed students to build their strengths in adaptability and perseverance as well as motivated them toward academic success. Third, based on the situational reality of external racism (as described by CRT), and what Black males learned growing up in a racialized society, the respondents expected negative issues related to race to arise and knew they would be judged based on their race. These expectations of judgment also came with the understanding that their academic ability and demeanor would be (pre)judged and stereotyped on and off campus. Consequently, respondents used specific, well thought out strategies to get them over the hurdle of discrimination and racism, which leads to the next major finding.

Fourth, graduation was an expectation and a goal to be met and was a major

finding in this research. Despite expectations from participants that negative issues would arise, it was also expected that the hurdles would not be high enough to prevent them from finishing their degrees. Aside from their personal goal of graduating, a few participants also mentioned that they felt they owed the community this victory of graduating from college. Specifically, they identified that their ancestors fought for them to have the opportunity for this experience, so their job was to prove that they were worthy of this goal.

Fifth, Black males expected that parent involvement in academic endeavors would be low due to the lack of college experience by parents. Parents were supportive but only to the extent that they fulfilled the role of being caring parents, since they could not provide much, if any, academic support. Finally, participants expected that university support would be available. Although the data showed that support was not actively sought, and in many cases, usually for athletes, the support provided was more for protocol than expressions of genuine care.

RQ2: According to Black male students, which identities were relevant to the persistence experience?

Due to the utility of CTI for exploring how identity is tied to relational and contextual interaction, data analysis sought to determine which individual relationships mattered most in the period before, during and after persistence. However, the data relevant to this research question were complex and clarity regarding exactly which identities mattered to the persistence experience was difficult to achieve.

First, in addition to CTI, CRT also played a role in understanding the identity

experiences for Black males at PWIs. When Black males have an interest in expressing an identity, they recognize that their identities are framed by the macro context, as postulated in the proposal for this research. Black males go into the persistence situation knowing that their cultural identities will work against them during the persistence period. Many respondents found that their PWI experiences mirrored the same types of experiences that happen in the macro-context of society outside of the PWI campus. Second, the data revealed strong themes of identity negotiation, strategy execution and the significance of the personal frame of identity. Personal identity was the strongest of the four identity frames (relational, communal, enacted, personal). Overall, it was important for interviewees to be able to be themselves and to believe in themselves, which were reasons why identity negotiation was so important.

The data analysis revealed that all relevant identities (black, male, student and athlete) were important in the PWI context and, therefore, all frames of identity were important to the persistence experience. Of the four frames, personal identity was of utmost importance because it was a precursor to other identities. When personal identity was strong, participants had no trouble enacting the other frames of identity and the outcomes of those identities; for example, being a good student or being a good role model. Having a strong personal identity allowed interviewees to articulate clear goals and to navigate the hurdles experienced, including lack of Black mentorship and high visibility on campus as well as a lack of institutional support during persistence. Overall, the personal frame of identity allowed respondents to potentially fill this void because once they became graduates; they saw they could become the potential role models and sources of social support for other Black males.

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RQ3:   According to interviewees, what is the value of social support during the
       PWI experience?

Academic support was defined as a subset of social support and referred to interactions that included discussion of academic issues. Social support referred only to instances of communication and support that excluded explicit discussion of academic issues. The value of support from parents was minimal in the early phases of the college experience and tended to be more social than academic. This was not due to lack of effort but to lack of experience. Because of this, support from parents was not held in high regard by the students, but they acknowledged that they understand their parents lacked relevant knowledge. Although other friends also had not attended college, social support from them was held in higher regard since they had potential to go through the college experience, and support was often displayed as excitement for the new endeavor and potential enhanced life status.

During the persistence process Black males referred back to outcomes identified in the previous research question results; that is, they understood throughout the college experience that race and race issues would be inevitable. Because of this, the value of social support was at best minimal, because their biggest support system was to rely on themselves and stay strong in the belief that graduation was attainable. After the persistence experience, it became clear that Black males were confident that they could now become the source of support for others in their communities seeking to go through the persistence process. This aligns with responses to previous research questions in that expectations for being an expert on the experience also means that one can and will

become a source of support for others. Overall, this question determined that self-support weighs more heavily and is more influential than any other type of support.

RQ4: According to Black male graduates, is the value of institutional support related to the development of identity during the PWI experience?

Institutional support was not one that participants discussed explicitly. Although there was a blurred line between institutional support and academic support, interviewees responses revealed some distinct ways that institutional support *should* be an issue of importance to the institution itself so that students can understand the types of support available from, through and with the institution. For example, participant data revealed that institutional support in the form of more African American staff and professors could have been valuable to them in the persistence process. In addition, it seems likely that the availability of African American professors, coaches, counselors and even other students who are African American would communicate to the student the efforts of the institution toward true diversity.

Contributions and Future Directions

There is a challenge in being a Black student on a PWI campus. Current ideas of a post-racial America suggest that racism has ended when, in fact, it has not. CRT makes it clear that race is an influencing factor on social experience including the social experience of Black students at PWIs. As Black males persist they run into issues that illustrate racial disparity, and overall, this means a number of things for retention of Black males at PWIs.

The research started off stating that issues of race play a role in how students navigate the PWI campus ultimately leaving them prone to dropping out or stopping out

to return later, but never returning. The long-term influence race has on daily experiences for Black males at PWIs documented and includes many obstacles to persistence, and ultimately graduation. Issues of feeling isolated and excluded were highlighted and provided an angle for understanding this as an issue that might have caused Black students not to graduate. Based on this idea it was also assumed that Black students needed positive support for the demands of their identities since a lack of support could have played a role and lead to the disruption of the persistence process for Black students and graduation.

Three main findings come from this research; however, they do not necessarily disprove previous research but provides another angle for understanding why Black males are not graduating from college. First, this research concludes that identity plays a significantly large role in the persistence process for Black males more so rather than support itself. Earlier postulations and in relation to Black males who fell victim to the drop-out or stop out clause while at PWIs, it could likely be for reasons related to identity management processes and not knowing how to successfully navigate the PWI campus; however, this cannot be fully concluded from the present study. Investigating the role of identity negotiation of students who dropped out could certainly be a direction for future research.

A second direction for future research could focus on new ways to provide institutional support. As noted, the negative expectations and experiences related to racial hurdles has the potential to cause students to dropout due to the stressful pattern of feeling 'othered' in the PWI context. To approach support from a new angle that acknowledges this reality would be to present university support in the form of programs

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as well as highly competent faculty and outlets for social support that specifically allow students to build self-esteem, new relationships and other personal attributes that allow them to see themselves as capable and worthy of the experience despite the setbacks and racial discrimination. In other words, these programs would focus on helping the Black male students build strong personal identities.

Third, Black males seek to protect their communal identity and their chances at graduation by enacting appropriate identity management skills, also seen as a persistence strategy. Knowing when identity was appropriate to negotiate and manage was a useful tool to the navigation process where the overall goal was to save face and maintain pride in the Black culture allowing Black students to see themselves as actors in the environments in which they inhabited and which lead to being able to have a vision toward the future of graduation. Learning more about these skills, which are the most helpful at which phases of the persistence process could be a very useful direction for future research.

Black male identity is quietly and covertly (but not always so) problematized and the ideas of inferiority that have been internalized even by Blacks leave the identity process to be characterized for Black males on the PWI as resisting, constructing and reworking identity and the perceptions of Whites. This type of strategizing is what gets Black males to graduation. Unfortunately, in accordance with Derrick Bell's (1980) work on interest convergence, to resist is still in accordance with what the context, specifically Whites, want and makes others feel less threatened by the Black identity. Essentially, it can leave Black individuals to still feel inferior as the ones feeling the need to make changes to accommodate the dominant culture. However, since this is the reality

of the Black/White binary color divide, Black males will need to learn new skills for navigating this context, to get to graduation. Aligning with this need for a skill set another direction for future research should be to understand which strategies are most useful. Knowing these strategies could be a wealth of support that can be provided to Black males during a mentorship well before they begin their college career as well as during and after. As CRT continues to illustrate, such strategies will unfortunately (and fortunately) continue to be useful in other micro contexts Black males will experience even after graduation.

To discuss strategies Black students can enact actively acknowledges that there will be hurdles based on the Black identity alone. To suggest that students and the university stay consistent in the fight against a power structure utilizing new forms of support as a game changer is promising. However, just as Keels (2013) states the dominant systems which problematize cultural identities are resistant to change. This highlights the constant critique of critical analysis to be utopic in nature but this is certainly not an unapproachable goal aimed at change.

Finally, although the current issue could benefit from examination from the aforementioned different angles, it could also benefit from a more holistic approach that considers many angles simultaneously including the effect of a dominant system. The process in which this research was methodologically carried out to isolate identity allowed me to identify its relevant parts. Although that was the aim of this research, the data could also benefit from taking a human ecological perspective. Using this perspective could be beneficial to understand all internal and external influences, on identity at any given time, including those identified by CRT, and the correlations of

those influences to each other. So not only understanding how the institution and the presence of race are directly related to how Black males experience identity, a human ecological perspective allows for understanding an even wider web of influence and impact. To this end identity could be studied as a product of the five systems identified by the theory.

Human ecology theory was pioneered by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and was developed to explain the influence of the external environment on current interactions. Specifically, it identifies five interrelated systems that evoke specific behaviors. Those systems are the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. First the microsystem is the immediate environment humans experience, which includes family and associate relationships and includes those people who have direct contact with you. The current research highlights the significance of this system and shows the connection between the students with family and friends. Once the student begins the persistence process employees of the institution may or may not become a part of their microsystem. The mesosystem is the relationship between these systems, like that of home and school, and identifies the fact that the relationships from the microsystem have direct influence on behaviors enacted in other environments. The current research also shows the presence of influence from this system, but not specifically how the behaviors transfer. For example, students may specifically be more accepting of a lack of campus resources if they have experienced and become comfortable with a lack of resources from home. This acceptance can become a norm in relation to needed resources but also indicate why a student does not know how to go about requesting or identifying the needed resources on campus. The exosystem identifies

the fact that social interaction occurring outside of the individual still can have an effect on the individual's behavior. For example, in a household where one spouse left the family relationship to relocate to an external location (e.g. divorce, new job, etc), this leaving could actually strengthen the relationship of the individuals that stay at home through increased bonding thus influencing behavior that encourages decisions made in connection to that relationship. This system also has potential compatibility with notions of CRT. The ways in which race relations occur outside of the household can influence the manner in which Black families function in their households and influence how individuals make decisions. The fourth system is the macrosystem which constitutes the culture in which an individual functions. Notions of CRT can also be applied in this system. The current research focuses on the impact of the macrosystem on the overall success of Black male college students at PWI. Overall, culture is seen as a system since it provides a context that the individual functions in and so an African American student's culture denotes their position in society and forces him to understand how to function in the larger system. Lastly, the chrono system identifies the impact of transitions on one's life. So for those athletes who move far away from home to an uncertain territory, the transition itself can influence their behavior once they reach their destination. For non-athletes the same can be applied in terms of transitioning to a new stage in life although they still have more full and physical access to their microsystem. Bronfenbrenner's research was concerned with the influence of proximal and distal contexts and the interconnection of the systems to produce human behavior (Luster & Hamilton, 2003). Using this angle in the research could provide a rich understanding of

the overall influence beyond the PWI campus to understanding student behavior and also a richer understanding of the impact of race within and among the systems.

Overall, the current research makes a contribution to knowledge confirming that identity is important to the persistence process for Black males and they should be open to enacting appropriate strategies that aid in getting them to graduation. The research also shows the need for institutions to be more active in the process of acknowledging and countering potentially shattering experiences causing students to potentially underperform. This research contribution gives hope to the large number of Black males who will enroll in college but who are likely to not graduate. Keeping a consistent eye on the social terrain in which Black males experience persistence solidifies the need for such recommendations.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study start with the inability to garner more response to RQ4 that refers to the extent to which the institution itself plays a role in the persistence in the process. Due to this information not being clear the research confirms the student experience but it is not absolutely clear what role the institution plays in that experience being possible. Interview questions were asked based on a campus level perspective rather than the perspective of a student who acknowledges that the 'institution' could possibly stand for people and institutional efforts outside of any racial analysis.

Another limitation of this study is that although this research set out to understand the experiences of Black males, it did not examine the other individuals implicated in the interpersonal dyads and communities associated with the full identity frame relationship in the relational and communal frames, respectively. This may be a useful angle for

future research. Having access to these individuals might provide deeper insight into the perceptions and interactions that Black males identify as relevant to their persistence process and also provide a perspective to these individuals about how their role in the interaction is consequently a role in a student's persistence to graduation. It would be my hope that a small bit of insight could help change the behaviors of those who may not fully understand their role in racist interactions and/or their potential to influence Black males to graduate.

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW SCRIPT

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
1. What are the expectations of Black male students during the periods related to before, during and after the PWI persistence process?	1. Can you tell me about the reasons why you initially wanted to attend college? 2. Can you name any specific moments that were significant marks of your college experience? 3. Was there ever a time when you thought you would not complete your degree? 4. How important was getting to graduation status?
2. According to Black male students, which identities were relevant to the persistence experience ?	5. What was your purpose/expectation for obtaining an academic degree? 6. Since beginning your college experience at the PWI, was there any change in your expectation of college?
3. According to Black male graduates, is the value of social support related to the development of identity processes during the PWI experience ?	7. What does it mean to be a Black student (at a PWI)? a. What does it mean to be Black to have graduated? 8. What is part of your everyday expression was important to your career as an undergraduate? 9. What type of groups and activities, if any, are important to be available on campus?
4. According to Black male graduates, is the value of institutional support related to the development of identity during the PWI experience ?	10. How did you choose the university you attended? 11. Who or what do you seek support from on campus? 12. What did your family think about your attending college? 13. What factors played a major role in getting you to this point/graduation? 14. Have you been a part of any groups on campus? 14a. Were those groups useful for academics or your socialization experience? 15. What does it mean to be a Black student in college? 16. What does it mean to be a Black graduate?