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# The African American/Black Male Experience at Grand Valley State University: Implications for the Future (Thesis)

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The African American/Black Male Experience at  
Grand Valley State University: Implications for the Future

Reba Loret Oguntokun

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

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Reba Loret Oguntokun

## Abstract

Researchers note that African American male students are disadvantaged by several social, psychosocial, and institutional factors. These factors affect their enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. This study, guided by Critical Race Theory in education, explores the lived experiences of African American male students at Grand Valley State University through in-depth interviews and the utilization of qualitative data analysis. Findings reveal that social, psychosocial, and institutional factors had the ability to positively or negatively affect the academic success of the participants. The issues most frequently mentioned by participants were public school education, minority status stressors (MSS), stereotype threat, environmental incongruency, differential treatment, low expectations, and a desire to prove misconceptions wrong. These findings reveal the salience of MSS at Grand Valley and Black men's desire to be successful and accepted at Grand Valley. They also indicate some ways in which Grand Valley can support its African American male students.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Problem Statement**

Ideally, college enrollment and graduation rates should be equivalent to societal representation. However, this is a false statement for African American students. Studies and statistical evidence have shown that African American male students' enrollment, retention, and graduation rates are abysmally low on college campuses throughout the United States (Cuyjet, 1997; Davis, 1994; Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2009; Slater, 1994).

The US Census Bureau (2011) reported that 13.1% of the US population was African American. However, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2011), of a total enrollment of 20,966,826 students in the fall of 2009 at Title IV institutions (institutions that participate in federal financial aid programs), 6.1% were Black. The Black population in Michigan is 14.3%. Amongst the 14 four-year public universities in Michigan, Black students account for approximately 1% of students enrolled. In 2011, the NCES reported that Grand Valley had a total enrollment of 24,662 students; 85% White and 5% Black (see Table 1).

Furthermore, the graduation rates (number of students conferred a college degree) of the 2003 and 2006 cohorts showed a median Black male to White male gap of 23.67 percentage points nationwide (NCES, 2011). Grand Valley ranks 74<sup>th</sup> of 102 colleges and universities with reported demographic data when compared to the overall Michigan Black student to White student ratio (NCES, 2011). This demonstrates that GVSU is behind most institutions in the state when recruiting, enrolling, and retaining African American students. Most institutions listed behind GVSU are categorized as four-year private (not-for-profit) and two-year public colleges and universities. Another indicator

of the problem is the negative feedback from students of color on Grand Valley State University’s climate study (Rankin, 2011).

Rankin (2011) stated that many respondents, students and faculty, were concerned with “overemphasizing diversity” and saw it as a form of “reverse discrimination...” However, at the same time, others want to see the faculty, staff, and student body more diversified. Most importantly the climate study highlighted racial tension as GVSU’s first challenge in that a greater percentage of “Respondents of Color (17%) reported personally experiencing exclusionary (e.g., shunned, ignored), intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct (harassing behavior) that has interfered with their ability to work or learn at GVSU when compared to their White counterparts (10%).” Thirty-nine percent of Respondents of Color indicated race as the basis for their treatment while only 3% of White participants held this perception. Despite low enrollment, low graduation rates, and the negative feedback in the climate survey, there has been no systematic study of the experiences of Black male students at GVSU.

Table 1

*Fall 2011 Enrollment*

	Female	Male	Total	Percentage
Black or African American	963	538	1501	6.1%
White	12762	8871	21636	84.3%
Total	14559	10099	24658	99.9%

(P. Batty, personal communication, June 19, 2012)

Enrollment at GVSU according to Phillip Batty, Director of Institutional Analysis (personal communication, January 10, 2013), is 6% African American while Caucasians comprise 84%. Of these students, 3.9% were Black women, approximately 2.2% were

Black men, and around 40% were White men (See Table 1). Table 1 identifies the Black-White male and female enrollment ratios at GVSU according to data from fall 2011.

Table 2

*Comparison of Black/White Enrollment at Michigan Four-Year Public Institutions*

College	% White	% Black	% Difference
Northern Michigan University	87	2	85
<b>Grand Valley State University</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>80</b>
Michigan Technological University	83	1	82
Central Michigan University	79	6	73
Ferris State University	79	6	73
Saginaw Valley State University	76	10	66
Lake Superior State University	78	1	77
Oakland University	76	9	67
Michigan State University	72	7	65
University of Michigan-Flint	72	13	59
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	66	4	62
Eastern Michigan University	63	22	41
University of Michigan- Dearborn	69	12	57
Wayne State University	50	28	22

(NCES, 2011)

Table 2 identifies Michigan’s 14 four-year public institutions and shows their Black-White populations. The median enrollment of African American student among Michigan four-year institutions is 9%. Grand Valley’s 5% enrollment is four percentage points behind that median (NCES, 2011). Only two institutions have a higher percentage differential than Grand Valley. The average Black-White percentage differential among all of the institutions is 65 percentage points thus demonstrating that Grand Valley supersedes that average by 15 percentage points due to its 5% to 85% demographic. In sum, Grand Valley’s Black to White student ratio is 5% to 85% according to NCES (2011) which is 20 percentage points above the median differential of Michigan four-year public institutions (65).

Table 3

*Comparison of Black/White Six-Year Graduate Rates at Michigan Four-Year Public Institutions*

College	% White	% Black	% Difference
Northern Michigan University	49	8	41
<b>Grand Valley State University</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>8</b>
Michigan Technological University	66	59	7
Central Michigan University	56	33	23
Ferris State University	44	24	20
Saginaw Valley State University	41	17	24
Lake Superior State University	36	29	7
Oakland University	44	18	26
Michigan State University	81	55	26
University of Michigan-Flint	40	27	13
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	91	78	13
Eastern Michigan University	44	26	18
University of Michigan- Dearborn	51	45	6
Wayne State University	39	8	31

(NCES, 2011)

**Graduation rates at GVSU**

Table 3 shows the Black-White graduation gaps amongst Michigan four-year public universities. Grand Valley ranks third amongst the listed Michigan institutions for closest six-year graduation gap differential. University of Michigan-Ann Arbor had graduated the most African American students within a six-year time frame.

Despite the relatively smaller differential, only 56% of Black students graduated in six years leaving the other 44% unaccounted for. When evaluating these percentages utilizing enrollment data from Table 1, 841 Black students graduated within six years while 660 did not. Meanwhile 13,847 White students graduated within six years with 7789 unaccounted for. The enrollment rate of Black students is 14.4 times lower than that of White students. Black students also graduate 16.5 times less than White students in six years.

## Retention rates at GVSU

The one year retention rate for students classified as “first time in any college” (FTIAC) students at GVSU for fall 2010 shows an approximate retention gap between Black males and White males of 10.6 percentage points (See Table 4). Since Black males are being retained 10.6% less than White males, naturally, fewer Black males are graduating from Grand Valley.

Table 4

### *One Year Retention Rates of Fall 2010 FTIACs*

	Female	Male	Total
Black or African American	79.5%	71.3%	76.6%
White	82.7%	81.9%	82.4%
Total	82.6%	81.3%	82.1%

(P. Batty, personal communication, June 19, 2012)

Four-year graduation rates for the 2007 cohort show a difference of 11.7 percentage points between Black males and White males (See Table 5).

Table 5

### *Four-Year Graduation Rate of 2007 Cohort*

	Female	Male	Total
Black or African American	27.1%	16.7%	23.6%
White	36.4%	28.4%	33.5%
Total	35.8%	27.7%	32.8%

(P. Batty, personal communication, June 19, 2012)

The five-year graduation rates of the 2006 cohort showed a difference of 19.2 percentage points between White men and Black men (See Table 6).

Finally, the six-year graduation rates for the 2005 cohort reported the narrowest gap with White men graduating at 8.6 percentage points higher than Black Men (See Table 7).

Table 6

*Five-Year Graduation Rate of 2006 Cohort*

	Female	Male	Total
Black or African American	49.7%	35.3%	46.5%
White	60.8%	54.5%	58.5%
Total	60.1%	53.1%	57.6%

(P. Batty, personal communication, June 19, 2012)

Table 7

*Six-Year Graduation Rate of 2005 Cohort*

	Female	Male	Total
Black or African American	57.1%	56.3%	56.4%
White	63.4%	64.9%	63.9%
Total	62.8%	64.2%	63.3%

(P. Batty, personal communication, June 19, 2012)

Thus, the data reveal that there is a clear gap between Black students and their White counterparts when it comes to enrollment, retention, and graduation from GVSU. However, despite this gap and despite the fact that the climate study revealed Black students' dissatisfaction with aspects of GVSU, little is known about the Black male experience at this institution.

### **Importance of the Issue**

Grand Valley's mission statement is, "Educating students to shape their lives, their professions, and their societies" (<http://www.gvsu.edu>). If this is true, Grand Valley should be shaping the entire student population. However, the evidence indicates that this is not so.

Overall, Black men are enrolled in, retained at, and graduate from Grand Valley at a substantially lower rate than White men. This imbalance at the institutional level not only affects opportunities for Black men at Grand Valley, but also affects the

opportunities for Black men in society (Carson, 2009). For example, lack of a higher paying jobs or the inability to support a family or own a property (See Theoretical Rationale for relationship with property). Grand Valley has the opportunity to break this vicious cycle.

Studies have also shown that when young African American males are not educated, they may end up in prison due to an inability to attain work, meet basic needs, or afford higher education (Lochner, & Moretti, 2004). There is already an epidemic in which Black men are incarcerated at extremely high rates (Lochner, & Moretti, 2004; Pratt, 2008). If Grand Valley continues to neglect one of the most disadvantaged of the student body, the university's mission is not being fulfilled. On the other hand, knowing the reasons behind the problems faced by particular student groups will allow Grand Valley to better accommodate them and understand their behaviors and struggles. Specific actions could then be taken to rectify the situation.

### **Background of the Problem**

Research regarding trends of African American enrollment at predominantly White colleges has existed for at least 20 years (Carson, 2009; Cuyjet, 1997; Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984; Greene et. al, 2008; Knapp et. al, 2009; Lochner, & Moretti, 2004; NCES, 2010-2011; Slater, 1994; Smedley, Myers, & Harell, 1993). Several studies have found that African American males suffer most from “underpreparedness” which typically leads to high attrition rates, college academic failure, and dismissal after admission to college (Allen, & Haniff, 1991; Cuyjet, 1997; Fleming, 1984; Greene et. al, 2008). This could be in part linked to the predominance of African American families living in a low socioeconomic status (Strayhorn, 2008).

In his book, *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol (1992) highlights the plight of African American children and families across the United States. While Kozol focused on the physical circumstances and variables surrounding a student's ability to excel, other researchers (Davis, 1994; Hood, 1992) focused on measuring the non-cognitive dynamics which are factors involving emotions and choices, not mental processes and perceptions. Hood found that it takes African American men longer to graduate and they are most often academically dismissed. Circumstances such as a lack of services (tutoring, advising, mentoring, and counseling) affect the retention rates of Black men on predominantly White college campuses (Hood, 1990; Hood, 1992; Sedlacek, & Brooks, 1976; Tracey, & Sedlacek, 1984). Hood also noted that students were not prepared for college coursework, had no sense of belonging, and failed to develop relationships with faculty or campus partners.

The African American male experience at PWIs developed very different results than African American males at HBCUs. For example, environmental incongruency was experienced more heavily by Black males at PWIs; they encounter a hostile environment, are discriminated against, and confront several other negativities (Carson, 2009; Cuyjet, 1997; Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984; Greene, Marti, & McClenney, 2008; Hood, 1990; Hood, 1992).

Still others have examined the correlations between the academic success of African American males with other factors like attrition rates (the rates at which Black males drop out), academic preparation for college, environmental congruency (equivalence in racial makeup between home environment and college environment), and campus support systems (e.g. tutoring, advising, etc.) (Carson, 2009; Cuyjet, 1997;

Davis, 1994; Greene et. al, 2008; Sedlacek, 1987; Smedley et al., 1993). They found that unpreparedness was linked to poorer performance in college; environmental incongruency posed great psychological and academic struggles; and the campus support at PWIs was perceived as lacking.

The GVSU climate study corroborates this finding. Rankin (2011) found that several students, faculty, and staff from “underrepresented populations (e.g., sexual minorities, racial minorities, commuter students, returning students, lower socioeconomic status students, parenting students) said they felt less of a sense of belonging than did traditional students.”

### **Black Male to Black Female Graduation Rates**

The national graduation rates of the 2003 and 2006 cohorts show a median Black male to Black female gap of 7.23 percentage points (NCES, 2011). On top of an underrepresentation of Black students at Grand Valley, national statistics show evidence that Black women excel at higher rates than Black men. The one year retention rate for FTIACs at Grand Valley for fall 2010 shows approximately an eight percentage point gap in retention between Black males and Black females (See Table 4). The four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates between these same student populations continue to demonstrate the deficit of the African American male at Grand Valley. Four-year graduation rates for the 2007 cohort show a differential of 10.4 percentage points between Black males and their female counterparts (See Table 5). When looking at the five-year graduation rates of the 2006 cohort, Black women widen the gap to 14.4 percentage points (See Table 6). Lastly, the six-year graduation rates for the 2005 cohort report the smallest gap between

these student populations with Black women graduating at 0.8 percentage points higher than Black men (See Table 7).

If the balance of race retention, graduation, and enrollment rates is to improve at Grand Valley, we need to understand the experiences of these students at GVSU. Such an investigation can yield information to better prepare young Black men.

It is crucial that GVSU investigates the social, psychosocial, and institutional factors related to its African American male students.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of African American male students at Grand Valley State University and answer these broad questions:

- (1) What are the social, psychosocial, and institutional experiences of African American males at Grand Valley?
- (2) What implications do the findings present for Grand Valley?

### **Definition of key terms**

#### ***Attrition***

The dropping out, withdrawal, or expulsion of students from a college or university (Tinto, 1982).

#### ***Institutional factors***

Methodologies, policies, and structures that the institution has control over that may positively or negatively impact the student. Examples are affirmative action, teaching methods, cost of attendance, support services or lack thereof, or institutional racism (Sedlacek, 1987).

#### ***Minority status stresses***

Unique stress experienced by minority students that heighten feelings of not belonging and interferes with minority students' effective integration in the university community (for example racism, questions about their right to be on campus, discrimination, etc.) (Smedley et al., 1993).

### ***Psychosocial Factors***

“The important issues people face as their lives progress, such as how to define themselves, their relationship with others, and what to do with their lives” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 42).

“The thought, feeling, and behavior of individuals” as shaped by the “actual, imagined, or implied presence of others” (Jones, 1998).

### ***Retention***

Keeping students enrolled, attending, and succeeding at a college or university (Hood, 1992).

### ***Social Factors***

The student and the institution have no control over background factors in their lives (Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones, & Allen, 2010).

### ***Title IV Institution***

Institutions with a written agreement with the Secretary of Education that allow them to participate in any of the Title IV federal student financial assistance programs (other than the State Student Incentive Grant (SSIG) and the National Early Intervention Scholarship and Partnership (NEISP) programs) (NCES, 2013).

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This is an exploratory study that solely investigates the experiences of African American male college students at Grand Valley State University.

### **Limitations of the Study**

My research study has several limitations. Since participants were not drawn using random sampling, findings cannot be generalized to African American males at GVSU. The sample size was small (12) and unequal in terms of who participated. Graduate students were slightly overrepresented while no students holding junior status were interviewed. Freshmen were the least represented of those who were interviewed. The participants who volunteered were also relatively involved on campus and in leadership roles therefore the sample did not fully represent the variety of all African American male students at Grand Valley.

Further research is necessary to better understand factors such as the relationship between involvement in Black organizations and retention or attrition, the thoughts or perceptions of the dominant culture in relation to Critical Race Theory, as well as the hard facts on the participants that can only be gathered post-graduation to see if research on graduation rates stands at Grand Valley.

Despite these limitations, the study has several strengths. It is the first in-depth look at the experiences of African American males at GVSU. The qualitative approach of semi-structured interviewing allowed an exploration of participants' experiences that would not have been possible with a structured survey. Finally, the study provides implications for change at GVSU.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the theoretical rational that guided this study and provide a detailed discussion of the literature. In Chapter three, I will discuss the research design. Chapter four will cover the findings and Chapter five will provide a discussion of the findings as well as provide recommendations for GVSU and future research.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

In this chapter, I present the theoretical framework of this study and provide a thematic synthesis of the literature related to the study. I discuss the limitations of existing studies in order to justify the need for this study.

### **Critical Race Theory**

This study is grounded in Critical Race Theory which draws on society's position in the past on race and how that position influences the present. I provide a summary of CRT in a legal sense while explaining its application in education.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in the mid-1970s with lawyers, activists, and legal scholars who were not pleased with the sluggish progress of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995; Hiraldo, 2010). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) applied CRT to education to look at inequity of education amongst marginalized groups in relation to the dominant group. This study employs CRT in education.

CRT has five main tenets: normalcy and permanence of racism, counter-storytelling, critique of liberalism, interest convergence, and whiteness as property (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001; Hiraldo, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995).

#### **Normalcy and permanence of racism**

The first belief of CRT is that racism is normal. It is how the world functions on a daily basis and is a staple of American life (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001, Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). In legal CRT, one notion is that the power in the hands of the White majority serves “important purposes, both psychic

and material” (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). The first characteristic of this notion is ordinariness which deals with the fact that racism is so pervasive that it is hard to either confront or eradicate (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001).

### **Counter Storytelling**

The second tenet of CRT is that due to the oppression of Blacks, Native Americans, Asians, and Latinos historically, these groups have what theorists consider a “unique voice of color.” The movement called “legal storytelling urges black and brown writers to recount their experiences with racism and the legal system and to apply their own unique perspectives to assess law’s master narratives” (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001, p. 9).

The concept of “voice” or what is also called “naming your own reality” employs “parables, chronicles, stories, counterstories, poetry, fiction, and revisionist histories to illustrate the false necessity and irony of much of current civil rights doctrine” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.13). Storytelling is used “to analyze myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render black and other minorities one-down” (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). Race is a social construction that has no concrete setting in biology or genetics (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001). It is a unit of measurement utilized by society for its convenience. CRT also recognizes the ways in which society “racializes” different groups during different times throughout history. An example is the advertising and inviting of Latinos to come and work in the United States and later penalizing or blaming them for stealing jobs from US citizens. “Intersectionality and anti-essentialism” mean that no one has a singularly, simplistically defined identity, therefore everyone’s identity overlaps in some way

(Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 8-9). White people do not experience the phenomenon of racialization unless they choose to align themselves in another manner that would assign them a category of racialization (Ladson-Billings, 1998). According to Ladson-Billings (1998), an example of this is White parents adopting transracially. She writes, “no longer a White family, by virtue of their child(ren), they become racialized others” (p. 11).

Three rationales are made in support of “naming your own reality” in legal dialogue:

1. much of “reality” is socially constructed;
2. stories provide members of outgroups a vehicle for psychic self-preservation;  
and
3. the exchange of stories from teller to listener can help overcome  
ethnocentrism and the dysconscious (King, 1992 as cited by Ladson-Billings,  
1998) drive or need to view the world in one way. (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.  
13)

The first rationale is illustrative of the legal relationship between moral and political analysis (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Universalism is a concept accepted by many scholars. However, this viewpoint discredits “anything that is nontranscendent (historical), or contextual (socially constructed), or nonuniversal (specific) with the unscholarly labels of “emotional,” “literary,” “personal,” or false” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 13). The second rationale surrounds the “psychic preservation” of the oppressed. Self-condemnation is directly connected to demoralization of oppressed groups according to Ladson-Billings (1998) and Delgado (1989). Storytelling in this rationale plays the role

of the healer amongst the racially marginalized. Thirdly, this “voice” can affect the privileged who usually do not see themselves as perpetrators of oppression. They find ways to explain away the issue of privilege and oppression while never self-examining (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As stated by Ladson-Billings (1998), “stories by people of color can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism” (p. 14).

### **Critique of liberalism**

The third tenet involves a critique of liberalism. Major themes revolving around school/civil rights legislation are the concepts of equal opportunity, equal treatment, neutrality, and color-blindness (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). “Color-blind, or ‘formal,’ conceptions of equality, expressed in rules that insist only on treatment that is the same across the board, can thus remedy only the most blatant forms of discrimination...that do stand out and attract our attention” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.7). Besides the push for equal opportunity and equal treatment, nothing more was being done to directly address past inequities.

Whereby rights and opportunities were both conferred and withheld based almost exclusively on race, the idea that the law is indeed colorblind and neutral is insufficient (and many would argue disingenuous) to redress its deleterious effects. Furthermore, the notion of colorblindness fails to take into consideration the persistence and permanence of racism and the construction of people of color as other. (DeCuir, & Dixson, 2004, p. 29)

This colorblindness serves as a means by which institutionalized racism can be disregarded and social inequality continues to be perpetuated (DeCuir, & Dixson, 2004; Hiraldo, 2010).

### **Interest convergence**

Interest convergence or material determinism is the fourth tenet. Derrick Bell, one of the founders of CRT, suggests that “Brown v. Board of Education—considered a great triumph of civil rights litigation—may have resulted more from the self-interest of elite Whites than a desire to help blacks” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7; see also Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). “Because racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class people (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eliminate it” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). Instead when pressure is applied and interests become jeopardized, the dominant culture is more apt to act. This action is not in response to the needs of the marginalized or the good will of White people but in response to securing a thing of interest. An example provided by Ladson-Billings (1998) highlights Boston’s model desegregation program. This program really was not a good model. What it did was ensure that White people benefited from the desegregation program by gaining access to magnet school programs and receiving extended child care. In the end, the program made sure that Whites were happy and remained in the system to some extent without consideration for African Americans.

### **Whiteness as property**

Whiteness as property is the last tenet. The main connect to this property. According to CRT, the US is the way it is because of property rights and civil rights legislation has been slow and ineffective. African Americans could not own property and were once classified as property themselves thus they were afforded no individual rights (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This being the case, Whites benefited from the creation of

whiteness as the ultimate possession (Harris, 1993 as cited by Ladson-Billings, 1998). Ladson-Billings asserts that this permeates into modern society in Hacker's (1992) parable in which White students voiced their opinions on being Black. Although things as perceived as better for Blacks, White students did not want to be Black. They asserted that \$50 million or \$1 million for every year they would be forced to be Black was acceptable compensation. Hacker stated:

And this calculation conveys, as well as anything, the value that white people place on their own skins. Indeed, to be white is to possess a gift whose value can be appreciated only after it has been taken away. And why ask so large a sum?.... The money would be used, as best it could, to buy protection from the discrimination and dangers white people know they would face once they were perceived to be black. (p.32)

Thus the symbolism of whiteness as property, privilege, and of value is illustrated.

Particularly in education the five tenets of CRT can be seen. Counter-stories can be utilized in higher education's climate studies and provide opportunities for change within that climate (Hiraldo, 2010). If the institution does not make positive change toward inclusiveness, diversity may be hard to keep therefore "in many cases, counter-stories support the permanence of racism (Hiraldo, 2010).

Whiteness as property comes in to play when evaluating right of possession, the right to use and enjoyment, the right to disposition, and the right to inclusion (DeCuir, & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). Historically whiteness has been seen as a benefit only available to White people (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). African Americans were property (Hiraldo, 2010;

Ladson-Billings, 1998). The fact that most African Americans are not in positions within academe to effect change in curriculum, academics, knowledge provisions, and role modeling, the value and importance of whiteness over color is further reinforced (Hiraldo, 2010).

Interest convergence recognizes that White people have been the main benefactors of civil rights legislation throughout history (DeCuir, & Dixson, 2004; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). DeCuir and Dixson (2004) held the contention that “early civil rights legislation provided only basic rights to African Americans, rights that had been enjoyed by White individuals for centuries. These civil rights gains were in effect superficial ‘opportunities’ because they were basic tenets of U.S. democracy” (p.28). A primary example of this is affirmative action which has been misconstrued as a policy or program which benefits people of color and disadvantages White people. In reality, White women have been the greatest beneficiaries of affirmative action (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Hiraldo (2010) notes the interest convergence in bringing diversity to campus. Money is brought into institutions and the campus is enriched by the presence of international students and students of color. However, what diverse students reap from the university is minimal in comparison with what the university reaps from increased diversity on campus.

Finally, critique of liberalism which rejects the concepts of colorblindness, neutrality of the law, and equal opportunity lets people ignore institutionalized racism and continued social inequality (DeCuir, & Dixson, 2004; Hiraldo, 2010). This continues in higher education and the field of student affairs.

Within higher education, both social and academic spaces are infiltrated by racial microaggressions (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Solorzano et al. define racial microaggressions as “both verbal and nonverbal assumptions about, and lowered expectations for, African American students” (p. 65). An example of racial microaggressions and hostility inside the classroom is the feeling of bias when group assignments are assigned or biased assumptions from faculty regarding your intellectual ability or academic integrity (Solorzano et al., 2000). Outside of the classroom, students felt unwanted in places like the library.

This theoretical rationale was chosen to examine the experiences of Black males at a predominantly White institution (PWI). CRT in education attempts to explain the relationship between law or legislation, education, and the perpetuation of social inequity. Along with this, the tenet of voice, counter-storytelling, or naming one’s own reality heavily supports this study as it is qualitative and solely vested in the experience of African American male students at a PWI. The notion of whiteness as property, valuable, and an asset directly conflicts with the Black male experience. Racism as normal is reinforced in academics curriculum, funding, assessment, and instruction according to Ladson-Billings (1998). Thus, this theory was used to examine and explain the participants’ experiences.

### **Thematic Synthesis of the Main Findings**

Studies have focused on multiple factors affecting African American males attending PWIs. These studies focus on three predominant categories: social factors, psychosocial factors, and institutional factors. These main categories encompass several subcategories that will be analyzed further during the study.

## **Social Factors**

Social factors consist of background factors that neither the student nor the institution has control over (Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones, & Allen, 2010). These include socioeconomic status, race, social skills that have been developed over time, and the K-12 education system.

**Socioeconomic Status.** One social factor that plays a huge role in a student's ability to enroll in and fund a college education is socio-economic status (SES). Several researchers have shown that affluence and family income have a positive correlation with academic achievement and college attendance (Dynarski, 2002; Griffin et al., 2010; Orfield, & Eaton, 1996; Perna, & Titus, 2004). However, this wealth is often inaccessible to African Americans who are overrepresented in the lowest socioeconomic ranks (Griffin et al., 2010). In 2001, Black families earned only 62% of what was earned by White families (Griffin et al., 2010). Because of lack of economic resources, many African American males with both the ability and intellect are unable to attend college (Griffin et al., 2010). CRT supports this notion in that wealth is correlated with whiteness as property. The denial of property and human rights to African Americans historically continues to be reflected in society today. It also serves as a means by which whiteness is exalted and valued while those of color are seen as the lesser beings in society.

**Pre-College Achievement/(Un)preparedness.** Socioeconomic status is also related to pre-college achievement or (un)preparedness. African American males tend to come from high schools where their structure is both biased and insufficient, therefore they do not prepare them to graduate from high school or enroll in college (Griffin et al., 2010). This is an issue that stems from one's high school education and experiences with

cultural capital which according to Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999, p. 159) refers to the “societally valued knowledge of ‘highbrow’ culture and cultural cues.”

Kozol’s (1992) book, *Savage Inequalities*, strongly supports the claims of several researchers. K-12 students in urban settings (often minority students) suffer from low qualities of life, a lack of talented educators, low expectations from professionals, violence, death, and many other negative factors. Kozol (1992) also asserts that racism and discrimination tend to be rampant. Government officials even go as far as to blame cities for their plight as opposed to taking responsibility or recognizing the challenges of the urban education system and its people (Kozol, 1992). Kozol describes how children “sit idle in classrooms,” are unsupervised, write with pencil stubs, have no chalk, share books missing hundreds of pages, have hazardous facilities, sleep in class, and function without the proper resources to be educated and live healthy, productive lives. More profoundly heart wrenching is Kozol’s (1992) assessment of the future success and failure rates of a kindergarten class at Mary McCleod Bethune School in Northlawndale, Illinois:

I stand at the door and look at the children, most of whom are sitting at a table now to have their milk. Nine years from now, most of these children will go to Manley High School, an enormous, ugly building just a block away that has a graduation rate of only 38%. Twelve years from now, by junior year of high school, if the neighborhood statistics hold true for these children, 14 of these 23 boys and girls will have dropped out of school. Fourteen years from now, four of these kids, at most, will go to college. Eighteen years from now, one of these four

may graduate from college, but three of the 12 boys in this kindergarten will already have spent time in prison. (p.45)

Likewise, regarding the regression of Black male college enrollment, retention and graduation rates, high schools are not properly preparing them for academic survival in college (Cuyjet, 1997; Davis, 1994; Greene et. al, 2008). If Black students are not receiving the appropriate training, study habits, and skills during their pre-college education, it is likely that they will not be able to excel within the college environment. Therefore, it is necessary for colleges and universities to build in mechanisms to help balance that plight.

Kozol (1992) also highlights both legal and institutional entities (i.e. tax breaks, property taxes, cutting cost due to failure rates, tax free institutions/businesses, etc.) that allow the notion of “the American Dream”, hard work, and pulling oneself up by his or her bootstraps to flourish.

Cuyjet (1997) defines underpreparedness as the inability to be successful academically due to any of the following conditions:

attending academically poorer elementary and secondary schools, lowered expectations of peers and significant adults toward academic achievement, peer pressure to disdain educational accomplishments and education as an outcome, financial hardships limiting educational access, lack of appropriate role models, and other barriers related to racism. (pp. 6-7)

Lee discusses developmental disadvantage which is:

those social, cultural, and economic forces that combine to keep black men from attaining traditional masculine roles and that therefore prevent them from

mastering crucial developmental tasks in childhood and adolescence that, in turn, negatively affect their social, academic, and career successes later in life. (1991, as cited by Cuyjet, 1997, p.7)

Cuyjet (1997) asserts that despite getting into college, many Black males enter unprepared due to financial strain or lack of monetary resources, inferior education, and other social, cultural and economic issues. A study on the pre-college achievement of African American students showed that they had lower scores in reading, writing, and mathematics along with a manifestation of lower academic achievement (Greene et al., 2008). However, Davis (1994) states that if a student has a higher high school GPA, he is more likely to earn an elevated cumulative GPA while attending college.

### **Psychosocial Factors**

According to Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010), psychosocial factors are defined as “the important issues people face as their lives progress, such as how to define themselves, their relationship with others, and what to do with their lives” (p. 42). Social psychology emphasizes “the thought, feeling, and behavior of individuals” as shaped by the “actual, imagined, or implied presence of others” (Jones, 1998).

Psychosocial factors include minority status stressors (stereotype threat, environmental incongruency) and degree aspirations.

**Minority Status Stresses.** Minority status stressors (MSS) as defined by Smedley, et al. (1993) are “unique stresses experienced by minority students that heighten feelings of not belonging and interfere with minority students’ effective integration in the university community (for example, experiences with racism [and] questions about their right to be on campus)” (p.435). Findings from several past studies

have revealed that when Black students are the racial minority they often feel as if this aspect is obvious to others and they lack a sense of belonging (D'Augelli, & Hershberger, 1993; Davis, 1994; Sedlacek, 1987; Smedley et al., 1993).

Since African Americans tend to reside among the lower echelon of SES, they may be forced to work while continuing their educational endeavors. It has been found that GPA and passing courses are negatively correlated with number of hours employed (Greene et al., 2008). According to Cuyjet (1997), the elimination of financial strain may be crucial for student affairs professionals who aim to assist Black men in college.

Due to the predominance of the African American population in the lower echelons of socioeconomic status, Smedley et al. (1993) comments that they reported higher mean levels of stress. This study also states that students with lower SES demonstrated higher mean stress levels. According to their analysis of the data collected, they found that MSS was the cause of an additional 9% of variance when measuring cumulative GPA as well as an additional 12% of the variance corresponding to psychological distress (Smedley et al., 1993). Unpreparedness also causes stress and strain upon entry into college and may lead to a negative self-concept, feelings of intrusion, and academic failure (Smedley et al., 1993).

When Black males at PWIs were compared to Black males at HBCUs, Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry, and Stanley (2007) found that the main difference between the two groups of college students were minority status stressors. One student reported the following:

Within the first three months of me being up here, I experienced five different racial experiences... that just really stressed me out. I'm here just trying to get my

education, didn't bother nobody, wasn't doing anything wrong but I was just suspected of doing something wrong. That just really, you know, just caused me to want to be hurtful and get in my all black [attire] and walk around with that build and just eye people, you know. It just made me think that they don't want me to be here... (Watkins et al., 2007, p. 110)

**Stereotype threat.** In corroboration with the previous finding, Carson (2009) stated that Black students possessed a mentality in which they believed that they had to achieve double that of others in order to prove their educational merit. Steele (2003) coined the term “stereotype threat” which is “the threat of being viewed through a lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (p. 253). He performed an experiment with equally able Black and White Stanford students in which the emotions and thought processes of the Black students were manipulated by telling them that the test that they were being administered was either a test of verbal ability or convincing them that the test that they were being administered was “race-fair.” What Steele found was that this slight difference in briefing or instructions changed the performance of the Black participants. When they were told that the test measure ability, the Black students tested poorly when compared to their White counterparts in the experiment. However, when they were convinced that the test was “race-fair” they performed equally as well as their White counterparts in the experiment. Steele also asserts that this problem manifests more in high achieving African Americans than low achieving African Americans.

All too often, African American students attending PWIs see themselves as unwelcomed and unacknowledged on campus which causes them to refrain from

becoming involved in campus activities (White, 1998 as cited by Carson, 2009). One Black male from the study responded that he does not really converse with other minorities because of racial tensions. He also does not feel as if he is a part of the university's "mainstream" (Carson, 2009, p. 334). Carson goes on to say that there are serious challenges regarding sense of belonging with respect to African American students due to a lack of diversity and representation at PWIs. Lastly, it has been found that African American males who exhibited higher levels of academic integration (assimilation into and contentment with the academic environment) did better academically (Davis, 1994). This compares with the previous statement regarding academic achievement in that success is not guaranteed; however, being intertwined in, having a positive outlook on and being connected to the institution suits a student better than not being enveloped in the institution.

Stereotype threat negatively affected the performance of high achieving Blacks because they were trying too hard whereas low achieving Blacks when faced with difficult tasks tended to give up or complete the task with little care resulting in low scores. Steele's experiment demonstrates that stereotype threat is an important factor in the academic success of students.

**Effort-Outcome Gap.** Green et al. (2008) found that the amount of engagement (time put into learning the materials, completing homework, and paying attention in classes) of African American students did not equate to higher GPAs or better grades when compared to their White counterparts. Based on this information, the results "suggest that their self-reported levels of engagement may represent an Effort-Outcome Gap—the result of having to put forth more effort in attempting to compensate for a

pervasive combination of academic and institutional barriers to educational success” (Greene et al., 2008, p. 529). Although this does not equate to more success, the research predicts that higher engagement of minority and underprepared students in both the classroom and at home may be extremely important to their overall success (Greene et al., 2008).

Despite this finding, Davis (1994) also remarks that African American males at PWIs who studied harder, obtained stronger peer relationships and held a positive view of institutional support were not guaranteed higher levels of achievement. He goes on to claim that Black students at PWIs suffer from more psychosocial harms and that these dilemmas display themselves in the academic performance of these students (Davis, 1994).

**Campus Involvement/Sense of Belonging.** Several studies have noted that Black males think that social, emotional and academic support at PWIs is dismal and the racial climate is antagonistic (Carson, 2009; Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984; Smedley et al., 1993). An example is a Black male student who enrolls in a course and is the only Black student in the class. He then notices that he is treated like a charity case by the professor (Anonymous, 2012, personal communication). Another example is a Black male walking back from class at night behind a White woman who grabs her purse and quickens her step when she sees him (Anonymous, 2012, personal communication). On top of the risk of being stereotyped as lacking in intelligence by others within the college community (Carson, 2009; Steele, 2003), there is much support for the notion that African Americans attending PWIs face serious challenges to both their psyche and their academic

achievement (Carson, 2009; Fries-Britt, & Turner, 2001). All of these examples are related to Steele's (2003) notion of stereotype threat.

**Degree Aspirations.** When degree aspirations have been explored, it has been shown that if Black males have higher ambitions they tend to earn higher grades in college and persist for longer time periods (Davis, 1994; Strayhorn, 2008). This same study demonstrated that the background characteristics of Black males at PWIs consisted of socioeconomic and educational superiority but lower degree aspirations. It seems that these positive background characteristics should have resulted in positive academic achievement but that was not the case. Carson (2009) noted that an African American student did not regard the grades that he received as a true measure of his abilities. He simply regarded completion of the course and receipt of his degree as his level of success.

### **Institutional Factors**

Institutional factors consist of methodologies, policies, and structures that the institution has control over that may positively or negatively impact the student (Sedlacek, 1987). Some examples of this are affirmative action, teaching methods, cost of attendance, support services or lack thereof. This section focuses on faculty characteristics, Eurocentric climate, campus support, student-faculty relations, and peer relations.

**Faculty Characteristics.** Several studies have looked at the qualities of faculty members (Cabrera, Alberto, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Serra, 1999; Lee, 2001; Love, 1993; Townsend, 1994). Faculty members must be cross-culturally trained and refrain from stereotyping and performing microaggressions which are "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically and

unconsciously” (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 67) for the sake of the minority student’s success. According to many studies, if African Americans determine that a campus environment discriminates or does not seem to care; their experience at the institution will suffer (Cabrera et al., 1999; Love, 1993; Townsend, 1994). Greene et al. (2008) notes that “White college faculty have been found to display culture-bound pedagogical approaches: a one size fits all style of teaching that may not be effective with the diverse learning styles of students in the ethnic minority” (p. 516).

... she got a B in physics before she came. She took physics again... she did her problems, got everything [in], and got a D on her exam. She looked at her friend’s exam; he was a White person, and he had gotten an A, and they had the same, almost the same exact answers on the exam... So she went up to the [graduate student instructor] and asked him... “What’s going on?” He [says] to her, “Well, I have not really been around Black people, or people like you before... I don’t think you did well on the test.” So she went up to the professor, and the professor didn’t do anything. She went to the chancellor. The chancellor had her drop the class.... Her parents are the ones who are paying for her education, but see, the first thing [the chancellor] asked her was whether or not she was on financial aid. So now she’s mad, upset, and going to be transferring to Howard University. (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 70)

Because teaching methods, services, and programs tend to be Eurocentric in nature, Black students may have a more difficult time adjusting or assimilating. For example, a student shared that “when she [the professor] gets to talking about the subject of racism, she doesn’t say ‘racism,’ and I’m like ‘No it’s racism.’ She doesn’t quite understand”

(Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 65). Many have asserted that they would prefer services provided by other African Americans. A student stated, "...I just feel more comfortable dealing with African American people in every aspect... counseling, financial aid. I just look for the first African American face I find because I feel like they're going to be more sympathetic" (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 70).

While most students have negative commentaries about teaching methods at PWIs, those in Carson's (2009) study on collectivism (a person's concern with the progress of the group to which he or she identifies with) felt the need to speak up when it came to racial conversations and dialogue in class. This opportunity to speak was seen as a positive and an opportunity to educate the ignorant. Other students have testified to feeling infringed upon when their race causes an unwanted spotlight to be cast upon them, particularly in class (Cheng, 2006). Some students take this attention in stride, while others loathe it.

**Eurocentric Climate.** Some studies have attributed negative experiences of African American males at PWIs to a cultural or environmental incongruence (Greene et al., 2008; Harris, & Kayes, 1996). Unfortunately because PWIs typically equate to less racial congruency between the home environment and that of the college, African American males received lower grades when compared to those at HBCUs (Davis, 1994). Programming, services, and overall mindset within these colleges and universities is Eurocentric which leaves little room for multicultural education, differences in opinion, or a more holistic outlook (Greene et al., 2008; Harris, & Kayes, 1996). These encounters have been identified as a significant hindrance to the retention and success of minority students. The previous institutional barriers coupled with minority students' elevated

levels of inequality in the area of academic achievement, places them far behind their White counterparts (Jacobson et al., 2001; Szelenyi, 2001).

**Campus Support/ Student/Faculty/Peer Relations.** Campus support needs to be available to African Americans and coincide with their needs rather than bundling them in with that of the majority population (Carson, 2009; Greene et al., 2008). It is important to note that when students have better relationships with faculty and staff as well as mentors, they tend to excel at higher rates than those who refrain from these particular contacts (Allen, 1985; Hood, 1992; Smedley et al., 1993; Sedlacek, 1987). In support of other researchers' findings, the Black male subjects in Hood's (1992) study listed "not getting help such as counseling and/or tutoring when needed" (p.21) as a pitfall of college going African American males. This could stem from other factors listed above that create a hostile environment for these particular students. Strayhorn (2008) found that strong and supportive relationships with peers, faculty and staff have a positive influence on African American male students. When students do not feel supported and this feeling is compounded with other disadvantages, they are likely to be academically dismissed or drop out of college.

### **Summary**

Some of the important variables that impact the experiences of African American males were social factors such as socioeconomic status, pre-college (un)preparedness, psychosocial factors (minority status stresses {MSS}, environmental congruency, sense of belonging, degree aspirations), and institutional factors (Eurocentric climate, campus involvement, campus support, and student, faculty, and peer relations). These factors can be explained by the five tenets of CRT.

These variables were found to have the greatest impact on the academic achievement levels of African Americans attending PWIs (Carson, 2009; Davis, 1994; Greene et al., 2008; Hood, 1992; Smedley et al., 1993). They have the potential to negatively or positively affect the success of Black male students. Whether or not the effect is negative or positive depends. For example, if one is from low SES (whiteness as property and valuable), this could hinder the student if they have to work more hours than suggested to support themselves, come from a school district that is not well equipped to effectively prepare their students for college (whiteness as property), or simply cannot afford to attend college (whiteness as property). On the other hand, a higher SES could allow for more opportunities to gain social capital, better schooling, or more financial capability to attend college. Likewise, feeling as if you belong at a PWI can positively affect a student academically and socially whereas a negative sense of belonging can further isolate the student or cause them to leave the institution altogether (racism as permanent, whiteness as property, interest convergence).

### **Limitations of the Literature**

While the studies reviewed in this chapter have enhanced our understanding of the experiences of Black students, there are limitations that need to be pointed out.

Some of the studies, for example those by Greene et al. (2008) and Szelenyi (2001), were conducted at community colleges, not four-year institutions. Their findings have limited applicability to GVSU. Other studies used quantitative surveys which allow one to attain responses from a large range of students, but do not speak to the heart of the issues regarding its specified population of interest. Both Davis (1994) and Watkins et al. (2007) conducted a comparative analysis of Black males at Historically Black Colleges

and Universities (HBCUs) and PWIs. While this analysis also provides valuable information, but it only denotes that there are differences in success rates between the institutions, Black male students, and environmental congruency. The quantitative studies focus on outcomes and do not allow you to understand the lived experience of participants.

Several qualitative studies have also been conducted. For example, Carson (2009) conducted a qualitative study on collectivism, but the sample was small, 16 students, of which 11 were African American females and five were African American males. While the study was valid, it provided limited information because the majority of its participants were Black women whereas I was interested in examining the experiences of African American male students. Smedley et al. (1993) explored issues regarding minority-status stresses which examined several variables with respect to college achievement. However, since the researchers looked at minorities as a whole, therefore relevant information on African American males at PWIs cannot be extracted. Lastly, Hood (1992) looked at attrition rates of African Americans in an Education Support Program at a PWi. It solely examined students in this ESP program and not the students in the greater population of the PWi.

The present study was influenced by both Critical Race Theory and the research literature. First, this is a qualitative study that utilizes storytelling, or counter storytelling, a key aspect of Critical Race Theory. Second, many of the questions utilized in the interviews used to elicit the stories, were based on the literature, especially, Carson's (2009) study on collectivism (see chapter three for further discussion).

Questions asked were drawn from the literature to include social factors (SES, pre-college achievement/(un)preparedness), psychosocial factors (MSS, environmental congruency, sense of belonging, degree aspirations), and institutional factors (Eurocentric climate, environmental congruency, campus support/student/faculty/peer relations). This study focuses specifically on the Black male population. Too often African Americans as a whole or in conjunction with other minorities become the focal point of studies, whereas this study will extricate information relevant solely to African American males, one of the most underrepresented populations on campus. With this data, faculty and staff at Grand Valley may gain knowledge regarding this population on campus.

## **Chapter Three: Research Design**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss the research design. I explain how I used Critical Race Theory to develop the research design. Next a description of the participants will be outlined along with the instrumentation utilized. I explain how I used the literature to develop interview questions. Methods of data collection and data analysis are examined within this chapter. Then I discuss data collection and analysis procedures. At the end, I summarize the chapter and introduce chapter four.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to uncover the experiences of African American male students at Grand Valley. This study sought to answer these broad questions:

- (1) What are the social, psychosocial, and institutional experiences of African American males at Grand Valley?
- (2) What implications do the findings present for Grand Valley?

### **Participants/Subject**

The method of data collection for this study was purposive/criterion based sampling—criterion being African American/Black male, GVSU student, and at least 18 years of age. In order to obtain participants for my study, I used three recruiting methods. First, I contacted students in early January via email through the office of Institutional Analysis headed by Director Philip Batty at GVSU (for complete email and letter of agreement from Philip Batty, Director of Institutional Analysis, please see Appendix). I used this strategy hoping that random sampling would get a more generalizable sample. This sampling strategy generated a total of three participants (two graduate students and

one sophomore). A reminder email was sent by Institutional Analysis at the end of January which yielded no additional participants.

Because this approach did not yield enough participants, I then contacted leaders of student groups to ask for volunteers. This method yielded two participants. Finally, I utilized snowball sampling, the process of asking those involved in the study for the names of others who may like to participate because they might be knowledgeable in the subject area of the study (Fraenkel, & Wallen, 2009; Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry, & Stanley, 2007). This method generated seven additional participants. There were a total of 12 participants (four graduate students, three seniors, three sophomores, and two freshmen). I believed that I had reached data saturation as the same patterns and themes continued to arise from the data collected from the participants.

### **Instrumentation**

The primary instrument used for this study was an interview protocol with two parts. The first set of questions asked about background variables and the second part asked about experiences at GVSU (for complete protocol see Appendix). The semi-structured interview questions for this study were based on the review of literature discussed in chapter two.

It is important to obtain the demographics of the research subjects in order to examine the relationship between certain aspects of a student's background and his current situation. Without this, the participant's history would not receive appropriate credit. Demographic variables were age, academic standing, GPA, high school academic information, home life information, and goals and aspirations.

The second portion of the semi-structured interview questions was both an adaptation as well as expansion from Carson's (2009) study to include information on social factors (i.e., socioeconomic status, pre-college preparedness, home life), psychosocial factors (i.e., minority status stresses, environmental congruency, involvement/sense of belonging, degree, aspiration), and institutional factors (i.e., campus involvement, Eurocentric climate, campus support, and student, faculty, and peer relations). Of Carson's 13 questions, two were changed or expanded upon, eight were the same, and three were not used in any capacity. I created 21 questions and probes to round out the information that I wanted to retrieve (see Appendix for full list). The literature review showed that the above factors had greatest impact on the academic achievement levels of African Americans attending PWIs (i.e. Grand Valley). The semi-structured nature of the interview questions allowed me to probe for more information when appropriate, ask other follow-up questions or ask new questions that add positively to the study.

As the researcher, I chose to include only data pertinent to the questions asked during the semi-structured interviews. Excluded data included items that were irrelevant, tangents, or off topic. I asked the specific questions outlined in the semi-structured interview protocol and clarified if a student asked for clarification. I also declined to give specifics on what was being looked for in a question as not to guide the student's answer. They were told to interpret the question in the most appropriate way they saw fit.

Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached. Data saturation is when "the number of required subjects usually becomes obvious as the study progresses, new categories, themes or explanations stop emerging from the data" (Marshall, 1996,

p.523). I knew that data saturation had been reached because there were consistent patterns in participant responses and little new information was emerging. Responses from the latter participants only echoed the former.

### **Setting**

This study was conducted at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan. After I obtained permission from the Human Research Review Committee, I began data collection. Face to face interviews took place during the winter semester of 2013 academic year. The location of the interviews varied vastly as the participant was allowed to choose a location convenient for them if they were unfamiliar with the Pew Living Center study room; however, all interviews occurred on GVSU's Allendale campus.

### **Data Collection**

All subjects were informed of their rights as a participant, confidentiality clauses, a request to audio record, and assured of anonymity in the reporting of findings. Interviews lasted between 17.5 minutes and 51 minutes and each participant was interviewed one time during the academic year. If the participant agreed to be recorded, a sound recorder on a computer was used to capture the participant's comments. Whether or not the participant consented to audio recording, descriptive notes regarding the participant's responses, demeanor, and attitude were taken. One participant simply began to talk about his experiences so I took notes as not to interrupt him. However, I recorded what I could in my researcher's log, input research questions where I possible, and reflected on the conversation after it was over. Only what was written down was included in the data set. Signed informed consent forms were stored in a locked drawer on campus

along with a researcher's log while audio recordings were stored on a password protected computer. After all audio recordings were transcribed; the audio was deleted for the protection of the participant. The participants were also given pseudonyms as identifiers to protect confidentiality.

As the researcher, I played a role as the facilitator of the interview. I remained objective throughout the interview process, asked the questions and clarified them in a manner that was not leading, and took notes on what I observed. Around nine hours were spent in the field conducting interviews; approximately 24-36 hours transcribing; and approximately five hours coding.

### **Data Analysis**

This study remains exploratory because it is an initial investigation on the experiences of Black males at Grand Valley State University. Data analysis utilized purely qualitative methods. Qualitative data analysis included a continued iterative process, data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection (DiCicco-Bloom, & Crabtree, 2006) and reflexive iteration, "visiting and revisiting the data and connecting them with emerging insights, progressively leading to refined focus and understanding" (Srivastava, & Hopwood, 2009, p. 77). These processes entailed coding, data analysis and reduction, memo writing, generating themes and patterns.

Data analysis occurred during data collection and after all the interviews had been transcribed. During data collection, my analysis was deductive in nature, where I searched the participants' narrative for a priori codes that had been discussed in the research literature. After data collection, I utilized an inductive approach, allowing in

vivo codes to emerge from the interview transcripts. Finally, I organize the emergent stories and counter stories.

**Analysis during data collection.** During the data collection process, a researcher's log was kept in which notes and reflections were made. Preliminary a priori and categorical themes were developed and guided the interview. The factors identified in the literature helped guide the coding process also helping to reduce and consolidate codes. Thus, I analyzed the data from a broader perspective and narrowed down to the specific inductive coding that was later employed.

I was also able to reflect on the commentaries of the participants post interview to examine their experiences, their ability to articulate those experiences, and interpret them. Writing these reflections down allowed me to reflect on the interview data immediately following the interview.

**Analysis after data collection.** After all data was collected, I transcribed the audio recordings of the participants if they allowed me to record them. If I was not allowed to record which only happened in one interview, I reflected on the notes taken from my researcher's log. All data relevant to the interview questions was included in the transcription. Irrelevant data and tangents were excluded. For example, a participant who was talking himself through the question or confused himself in what he is trying to say.

Transcriptions were then printed and examined line by line for codes that had been developed a priori (pre-developed) and those that emerged during inductive coding (directly from the data) (Srivasta & Hopwood, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Transcripts were reviewed several times throughout the reflexive iteration process (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Srivasta & Hopwood, 2009) to ensure that my

interpretations were appropriate and to develop categories and themes based on the patterns drawn from the transcripts.

**Open coding.** Although a priori codes like stereotype threat, minority status stressor, environmental congruency, and social, psychosocial, and environmental were taken from the reviewed literature, codes created from the data were inductive. For example, prove them wrong, ignorance, doctorate, and hostile are inductive codes. I read the transcripts line by line and wrote a concept to summarize the data within each section. A total of 218 codes were generated. I then went through the codes to reduce them to a manageable number.

During the coding refinement and revision processes, all codes appearing only once with no comparative ability were removed from the scheme. Codes appearing multiple times with different wording were consolidated into one code fitting all data related to that code. As an example, I consolidated the code “sticking out” under another code “hyperawareness of being Black.”

Codes related to other codes were defined individually and consolidated into a single code if relevant. For example, “disconnected” referred to a student’s lack of involvement at the university while “minimal involvement” meant very little involvement at the university. They meant the same thing so I consolidated them into one code, “disconnected.” At the end of this process, there were 35 distinct codes.

These 35 codes were then written individually on sticky notes and placed on a blank wall. I then continued to group the related codes together and noticed that many of them fit into categories and themes provided in the literature. The arrangement was

revised a total of four times before feeling comfortable with all classifications. At the end of the process there were 35 codes, 10 categories, and three themes (see Chart 1).

Chart 1

*Coding Analysis*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Theme</b>
1 Urban	<i>Home Life</i>	<b>Social Factors</b>
2 Hostile Environment		
3 First Generation		
4 Peer Influence		
5 Divorced		
6 Low/High HS GPA	<i>Pre-college Achievement/Unpreparedness (K-12)</i>	
7 My Level/Like Me		
8 Pushed/Forced Education		
9 Preparation/Lack thereof		
10 Debt	<i>Socioeconomic Status</i>	
11 Financial Strain		
12 Financial Savvy		
13 Financial Aid		
14 Racial Ignorance	<i>Eurocentric Climate</i>	<b>Institutional Factors</b>
15 Microaggressions		
16 Differential Treatment		
17 Mentor/None	<i>Faculty/Staff Relations</i>	
18 Low Expectations		
19 Teaching Strategies		
20 Bias	<i>Education</i>	
21 Low/High College GPA		
22 Greyscale/Credentials		
23 Laker Again	<i>Skills Learned</i>	
24 Time Management		
25 Real World Experience		
26 Stereotype threat	<i>MSS</i>	<b>Psychosocial Factors</b>
27 Hyperawareness of Black		
28 Motivation/Motivator	<i>Aspirations</i>	
29 High Degree Aspirations		
30 Role Model/Hero Mentality		
31 Give Back	<i>Involvement/Sense of Belonging</i>	
32 Very Involved		
33 Disconnected		
34 Trying/Making Efforts		
35 Environmental In/Congruency		

Chart 1 lays out the arrangement of codes, categories, and themes. Codes are listing via their inductive or a priori indicators. They were then organized under the majority a priori categories that were drawn from the literature review to best reflect the relationships between the experiences that produced the codes and the category from the literature. Lastly, categories were also arranged until the a priori themes drawn from the literature.

### **Summary**

In sum, the research design employed semi-structured interviews with the purpose of discovering the experiences, both positive and negative, of African American male students, over the age of 18, attending Grand Valley State University. This relates directly to the storytelling or counter-storytelling tenet of CRT to shed light and give voice to the experiences of marginalized groups. The interviews were manually transcribed and coded. Codes were refined during the data analysis process in order to ensure the validity of the interpretation. The final chart included 35 codes, 10 categories, and three themes. The findings will be presented in chapter four, followed by a discussion of the findings in chapter five.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

In this chapter I present the findings of this study. I first describe the context in which the study was conducted.

### **Context**

Grand Valley State University is a predominantly White institution located in rural Allendale, Michigan with 2.2% African American male enrollment. It is located about 13 miles from Grand Rapids, Michigan and approximately 22 miles from Grand Haven, Michigan. Its retention rates for African American males lag behind that of their female counterparts and that of White men. Although Grand Valley has begun taking steps toward rectifying this situation, much progress is necessary.

The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 40 years old with an average age of 23 years old (see Table 8). The reasoning for this result is that the majority of participants were in their early to late twenties with one graduate student (anomaly) being 40 years old. Participants were four Master's level graduate students, three seniors, three sophomores, and two freshmen. Eight students were FTIACS, three were transfer students, and one was an international student. All participants fell into one of five university colleges: College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS), College of Community and Public Service (CCPS), College of Education (COE), Brook's College of Interdisciplinary Studies (BCIS), and the College of Health Professions (CHP).

Table 8

*Participant Demographics*

<b>Participants</b>	Andre	Byron	Terrance	Franklin	Darryl	Jamal	Khamari	Quincy	Solomon	Xavier	Shawn	TaeRown
<b>Age</b>	19	21	22	22	18	22	26	23	23	40	18	19
<b>Parents</b>	Divorced	--	--	--	Divorced	Divorced	--	--	--	--	Divorced	--
<b>Home Environment</b>	Urban Hostile	Urban Hostile	Urban	Urban	Urban Hostile	Urban Hostile	Urban	Urban Rural	Urban	--	Urban Hostile	Urban
<b>HS GPA</b>	3.5	2.7	3.0	3.6	3.89	--	3.67	3.8	3.4	--	3.3	3.6
<b>Status</b>	First Gen FTIAC	First Gen FTIAC	FTIAC	FTIAC	FTIAC	Transfer	Transfer	Transfer	FTIAC	INT	FTIAC	First Gen FTIAC
<b>Year</b>	Soph	Soph	Sen	Sen	Fresh	Sen	Grad	Grad	Grad	Grad	Fresh	Soph
<b>College GPA</b>	2.7	3.1	2.65	3.2	3.0	3.5	3.02	3.89	3.8	--	3.4	2.7
<b>Living Environment</b>	On	On	Off	On	On	On	Off	On	Off	Off	On	On

**Key**

Int- International                      FTIAC- First time at any college                      Living Environment- On or off campus                      --No information

Table 9

*High School and Undergraduate GPA Comparison/ High School and Graduate School GPA Comparison*

Name	High School	Undergraduate	Difference	High School	Graduate	Difference
Andre	3.50	2.70	-.80			
Byron	2.70	3.10	+.40			
Terrance	3.00	2.65	-.35			
Franklin	3.60	3.20	-.40			
Darryl	3.89	3.00	-.89			
Jamal	--	3.50	--			
Shawn	3.3	3.4	+.10			
TaeRown	3.60	2.70	-.90			
Khamari	--	--	--	3.67	3.02	-.65
Quincy	--	--	--	3.80	3.89	+.09
Solomon	--	--	--	3.40	3.80	+.40
Xavier	--	--	--	--	--	--

## Findings

As has been stated prior, the purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of African American male students at GVSU. The findings are presented in the following order: social factors (SES, home life, pre-college achievement/ (un)preparedness), psychosocial factors (MSS, aspirations, involvement/sense of belonging, environmental congruency), and institutional factors (Eurocentric climate, faculty/staff relations, education, and skills learned). This means of organization seemed the most logical and also provided consistency and continuity throughout the study.

### Social Factors

Social factors consist of those things that neither the student nor the institution has control over (Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones, & Allen, 2010). Some of these factors are established by parental background, race, social skills that have been developed over time, and the K-12 educational systems. Social factors related to the study include the following: home life, SES, and pre-college achievement/unpreparedness.

**Home Life and School Environment.** According to Table 8, 10 out of 12 students reported coming from large, urban environments. The high schools that they attended were chiefly either predominantly African American or very diverse in population make up: “My high school demographic was 98% Black students and 2 % other, including White, Asian, and Hispanic” (Byron). Another student described his high school racial breakdown as “...majority Latina/Latino. Latinos and Latinas made up roughly 50% of the racial dynamics. The second highest population was Black people. After that were some White people and some Asian people and people that were biracial” (Franklin).

Four explicitly stated that their parents were divorced (which also encompassed single parent homes). The other eight participants did not make this distinction.

Environmental incongruency was shown in the majority of participants given that 10 of 12 claimed a large urban city as home. One third of the students interviewed described their home life as hostile or dangerous. Although one third of students identified as first generation college students (neither parent went to college or received a Bachelor's degree), almost all participants expressed a strong encouragement or expectation from their parents that they would attend college and be successful.

Regardless of marital status, the majority (10 of 12) of participants stated that their parents either forced or pushed education on them. Darryl stated that "They were always strong in my education. They always pushed me." Solomon reinforces this notion by stating, "My mother forced...there was no doubt in her mind or anybody else's in my family that I or anybody else in my family that we was going to college." A final example comes from Jamal, "That's a really big one just because I was homeschooled from the 6<sup>th</sup> grade all throughout high school."

One third of participants described their home environment as hostile meaning unsafe. Byron provides a vivid description of what it was like: "I grew up in...the inner city... Now and days it's pretty bad though. The gangs and stuff tore up the neighborhood." Jamal's sentiments regarding his home and school environments were similar to those expressed by Byron:

[The job I have]... has made me empathetic to the issues that other people have faced that I haven't given my home schooled background. It has also exposed me

to many issues faced by other students. My mom protected us from most of these things. (Byron)

It seemed that a hostile or lacking environment whether at home or at school negatively affected the participants overall. Although many participants recognized their disadvantage, only one student's parents removed or protected him from these negative environments.

**Socioeconomic Status.** SES was seen to play a huge role in the academic success of participants now and in their future academic endeavors. Many of the participants expressed issues with financial strain.

My dad told me that he wasn't paying for me to go to college so I had to go get a scholarship somehow which I did. I did get a scholarship for being a minority and I was in good academic standing through middle school. (Andre)

One student expressed his monetary struggles and their effect on him and his educational goals:

So my family has always been kind of poor so we have a lot of financial aid and I got a scholarship upon coming here without doing anything...I kind of don't have a lot to work with as far as money goes that's why I'm working and trying to get a better job because they don't pay much... Next year I'm going to be living off campus so there will be moments where I have to pay for my own food and that's something that's new to me completely. So I have to really become an adult and start to budget my money more because I can't afford to live on campus anymore. It's really expensive. (TaeRown)

Although these are just a few, almost all of the participants have taken out student loans and rationalized that they could pay back the loan debt with the career they expect to embark upon in the future.

I never looked at the monetary aspect that much. I knew college costs. I always figured that when I get out and get a good job I'll be able to pay off loans. I don't have as many loans as some people do because one thing I did do was start at a community college. (Jamal)

Graduate students and a few undergraduates displayed markers of financial savvy:

It really doesn't affect my academic achievement. I don't really worry about money due to the graduate assistantship and other accommodations that I have.

My parents usually help me if I need it really bad. (Quincy)

Financial strain, worry about debt, and financial aid usage was rampant amongst the participants. However, graduate students with assistantships and undergraduate students from higher SES indicated no strain and were comfortable in their lifestyle and ability to fund their education.

**Pre-college Achievement/ (Un)Preparedness.** Based on the GPAs reported by the participants (see Tables 8 and 9), the majority of them earned good grades in high school. Despite these high GPAs, it is known that the quality of education in urban centers often is subpar to the education systems of other areas of the country. Jamal stated:

The education in the [city] public school system at that point was not good...I could actually go up to a teacher and change my grade and they wouldn't care. So

if I got a C... I could take the paper, change the grade, and they wouldn't care so the structure was very off. (Jamal)

The parent of this student chose to home school him when she found out about this incident. Byron also described his high school environment in a very negative fashion:

My high school...was right in the middle of the ghetto, and there were shoot outs there every year, gangs in the school, a lot of marijuana smoking in the bathroom...Just gangs and a lot of violence...all types of stuff. I would look at it like a juvenile detention hall rather than a school. It was like a bad babysitting service or something. (Byron)

Another student talked about applying himself to get into advanced classes in part to get away from "those people" (other Black people):

You know I spent a lot of my time in a lot of advanced classes too so of course there were less of "those people" (laughter). There were less of "those people" in advanced classes because they didn't apply themselves to get out of even lower than general education kinds of classes so I kind of like filtered out... (Andre)

This particular example speaks to the school systems within many urban cities and how African American students are highly populated in lower classes than other students.

Several of the participants of this study held themselves in high regard and understood the premise that to get to college and be successful, they needed to surround themselves with like-minded individuals. Terrance reflected on this statement:

I pretty much hung around the students that were involved and planned on going to college...So I just hung around people who I knew were going to make

something out of life. We all knew that we wanted to go to college. We knew that high school wasn't the end result. (Terrance)

Franklin echoed this sentiment, "We all had the consensus of being educated. The reason being because of the public schools in my city, we have some of the worst education systems there is in the entire nation."

Two other participants discussed how like-minded friends affected their intellectual prowess. TaeRown said, "My friends were actually smart too. Having smart people around made me keep up my intelligence to a point too" while Quincy stated, "I think my peers made me focus harder. I was always with a lot of smart people. I had a 3.8 but I was 36<sup>th</sup> in my class... They all were competitive about grades overall."

By surrounding themselves with the likeminded, they were able to progress to the standard that they saw as acceptable while drawing on the determination of the others. All of them succeeded in making it to college. Many of their friends did as well, however some were left behind.

Despite this mindset, a lack of preparedness has the potential to derail one's aspirations. As stated above, the public school systems within the inner city are highly flawed thus disadvantaging these young men in their quest to become educated and successful in life.

High school was a joke and when I say joke I don't mean in a joke in a funny way. I mean it was real bad. You didn't have to really do any work. I was actually talking with one of my friends over the winter break about how stupid high school was. All we did was come to school and get a grade. I don't remember learning one thing from high school. I'm actually a good student here which is surprising. I

know a few people who went to universities down south after graduation and...got kicked out because they did so bad[ly]. (Byron)

Another participant pinpointed the rating of his high school and the barriers it faced:

I think we got a C or D rating due to lack of GPA, lack of resources. They just restructured the high school. There's a lot of reconstruction but it's still rated one of the lowest schools, especially in the area. (Solomon)

Given the influence that a high school has on college preparation, the above examples are demonstrative of society's failure to these students. As not to point the blame, all of the participants have found their way to resiliency in their drive for education. Though the odds are against them societally and financially in many cases, they have succeeded in their goal of "proving people wrong" while continually combating stereotypes.

### **Psychosocial Factors**

As stated before, social psychology emphasizes "the thought, feeling, and behavior of individuals" as shaped by the "actual, imagined, or implied presence of others" (Jones, 1998).

**MSS.** Minority status stresses are defined by Smedley, et al. (1993) as "unique stresses experienced by minority students that heighten feelings of not belonging and interfere with minority students' effective integration in the university community (for example, experiences with racism [and] questions about their right to be on campus)" (p.435). All students in the study described several forms of MSS within their lives both inside and outside of the institution. In one case, a participant disassociated himself from

his “Blackness” while others sought to expel any notion of both their and society’s definition of the stereotypical Black male. Solomon stated:

I faced a lot of racial discrimination my first couple of years here. I was called a “nigger” about three times my sophomore year of college while on campus by three different individuals...They were reported to the police and as of now I don’t know if anything has happened and I’m now a grad student...

Learning how to play the “White” game plays a major role in the academics here. Understanding that you are going to be called upon as the “Black experience,” as the Negro voice...I was told, even when I was in China, by one of my favorite professors who’s White that “you have to realize that you are a person of color. You will be for now on. Now that you are educated, you will stand out and people will look at you so you need to be informed.” (Solomon)

Quincy described being an African American college student at a PWI as “Pressure. I think it’s a huge weight.”

One participant in particular chose to completely disassociate himself with what he saw as Black therefore dismissing a part of his identity:

I spend most of my time actually with Caucasian people. I’d spent a lot of time with them because I don’t... like I know I’m Black but I don’t like to hang out with a lot of Black people because the Black people that were where I lived, they were very ignorant. We had the “civilized” Black people and the “ignorant” Black people. They just frustrated me a lot. Like you are the reason that we have these stereotypes. (Andre)

Meanwhile another student discussed being Black at a PWI as a motivator despite the MSS associated with it: “It actually motivates me more because I feel like because I stand out, I have to do better. You’re noticeable so you have to do better” (Terrance).

**Stereotype Threat.** Stereotype threat was revealed in several of the commentaries from participants. Quincy said, “Like if you mess up, it’s probably because you are Black. Sometimes I have accidentally misspoke or done something wrong and I automatically think that others think that I’m dumb.” He later spoke to situations in the classroom that reinforced the notion of low expectations from faculty members.

When you mess up, instead of being pushed harder to do better, it’s like “oh you’re an African American males so you probably had this X, Y, Z happen to you or you might not be sufficient in these areas” so they let it go. (Quincy)

Darryl explicitly expressed his desire for higher education and not conforming to stereotypes: “So I won’t be a stereotype of an African American man that’s either dead or locked behind bars.”

Terrance specifically looked at the image portrayed by his peers that negatively reflected on him as an African American male.

I do not but I’m speaking more from an image standpoint. I feel as though my peers don’t understand the image that we should portray in public sometimes. Even in student organizations...we think that we have to have certain things or somebody should help us out or we always want to play the victim. We don’t understand that how we handle those situations gets played out in conversations across campus so any small thing that we do is always associated as the entire

race versus if one other student of a different race do something, it's not really associated with their race. It's just a "student" did something. (Terrance)

Another student talked about the connection between blackness, environmental incongruency and societal misconceptions about Black men.

It's a lot of telling people that you are not on the football or basketball team. You become the go to expert for anything ethnic. In all honesty, I have never felt so Black until I came to Grand Valley. When I was growing up, I was Khamari. When I was in [city], I was Khamari. When I came to Grand Valley, I was my Black friend Khamari. With that idea aside, going to a predominantly White university... [undergraduate] was majority white as well, but diversity was more apparent. You normally don't group yourself. You kind of get grouped and frankly you are going to be around people that you are more comfortable with. Due to my background and growing up in a diverse community, I never had to cling to ethnic unity... I feel like at this institution, you aren't cast out like a leper but you are treated like a visitor. (Khamari)

*Environmental Incongruency.* Only one student participant's home environment was congruent with the racial demographic at Grand Valley. The other 11 were from both very diverse or predominantly Black cities and high schools. This environmental incongruency, for some, has been seen as a challenge. Solomon described it as a "challenging opportunity" where he is challenged, could challenge others, and "learn and grow" in the process.

Another participant described it as a wakeup call and a means by which to really consider why he came to college and if safety would be a long term issue.

Hard because I know I get looks all the time. One example was me and my friends were coming from Meijers and it was late... like nine o'clock. It's really dark at nine. There are not that many street lights over there... [and] walking to the bus stop, trying to cross the street and the light was green...somebody was coming. They were turning. I guess they noticed that we were Black and when they were turning they almost hit us. We were like "oh my God" and trying to get out of the way. They rolled down their window and said "Oh my bad. You too black. I didn't see you."... Did we really make the right choice in coming to this school? Are we going to be safe from anything? ...I didn't really experience any of that in the city because it was mostly Black people. (Darryl)

Finally, a student described it as an environmental change:

I think that it's just an environmental change for me. I came from a large city that was very diverse to coming to Grand Valley where there's nothing when compared to what the city I'm from has to offer. There's a highly homogenous group of people here and I think that a lot of the times, not necessarily my case because I already knew what I was getting myself into when coming to Grand Valley, but for a lot of other individuals that are non-White receive culture shock because they have never been around such a homogenous group of people that look different than they do. (Franklin)

Connected to the previous environmental change came a need to either assimilate into the environment at GVSU or stand out. Shawn chose to stand out linguistically.

You get looks sometimes. Where I'm from and the way that I talk isn't frowned upon because everybody talks that way but here some of the words that I tend to

use in my everyday speech don't please everybody so I get asked to not use these words and not say things. Sometimes I'm just like okay whatever. I don't watch what I say around that person but I make sure that I don't use that word around the person so I don't have to listen to 'em say it again. (Shawn)

**Involvement/Sense of Belonging.** A student's involvement on campus was not directly proportional to his sense of belonging. The sentiments regarding representation on campus and being a part of the larger campus community were mixed.

What I've seen, there have been things to try to involve us Black student on campus like the Martin Luther King things they had with all of the events for us to come out to. So it's like they know that we are here and they're trying to do something to help us feel welcomed in a way. (Darryl)

Darryl also noted a distinction between social and academic involvement.

I want to say as far as like socially wise, I could go anywhere and I would be known by name. On an academic level as far as knowing people higher up besides my teachers, I would say that I am not quite there yet... I don't get involved with my teachers unless my grade is really low and I really need it to go up. (Darryl)

Some that were involved in student organizations and/or worked on campus expressed dissatisfaction with their representation on campus or the lack thereof. Khamari said, "Personally, I don't think that I am and that extends past race..." Solomon expanded on his experience:

Since I am the billboard member of Grand Valley...the poster child for the African American community at Grand Valley State University... I feel like GVSU is trying. I see the marketing that they're trying to do. But there's not

enough of us on campus. There needs to be some reworking of some systems.

There needs to be people who are better suited and more passionate about finding minorities, to actually focus on minority students. If you have people that look at this as a job instead of being interested in bringing these types of students on campus that aren't just low income, at-risk students or actually going outside of our Chicago and Indiana bubbles and looking elsewhere but we don't have that or that motivation. (Solomon)

Even still, others were torn in their responses and referred almost unanimously to one recent change in GVSU's academic calendar.

...I don't know...I have to say yes. I really don't know but I'm leaning toward yes because there are so many Caucasian students and they just brought in MLK Day. Black history month really isn't a big thing here even though every month is Black history month in my book. It's a tough question. (Byron)

Another student also mentioned GVSU's attempts and efforts toward proper representation.

I feel that they're taking a lot of steps to increase the representation of African Americans and African American culture. MLK was a primary example of that. I think that it's hard to cater to a demographic that you might not know a lot about because there's not that many to assess... I also know that culture does matter because they're a checklist... (Jamal)

Some undergraduate and graduate students are completely disconnected from the university altogether. TaeRown (undergraduate student) stated, "I'm just here. I'm here

trying to get my degree and stop paying large amounts of money. That's my goal." On the other hand Quincy (graduate student) asserted:

I don't because I think that I am here to get mine. I don't feel like I need to get connected because I could just do what I need to do to get to the next step in my life. There's no real connection to Grand Valley per se. (Quincy)

Khamari looked at this as a choice.

You are as much a part of it as you want to be. It's not such a large school but it is large enough for you to find your own experience and run wild with it. I think that it is just whatever you make of it. (Khamari)

On a positive note, 92% or 11 of 12 participants would choose Grand Valley again if given the opportunity to start over. Many of them showed an appreciation for the experiences that they have had at GVSU, the education and real world experience that it provides. Several also explained that they only applied to GVSU and that there was something in particular about the name that drew them in.

One student discussed regret because he did not take time out during his education to immerse himself at a historically black college or university (HBCU).

At times, I really wish that I had spent a semester or two at an all-Black college just to see what it's like to be around a bunch of all of us especially if you weren't raised inside that environment. And an educated bunch of us. (Solomon)

**Aspirations.** Most of the research subjects expressed high degree aspirations (doctorate). Those that did not expressed a dislike for education or the education process. They also seemed open to the idea of continuing education if it were necessary to attain their end goals in the future.

Several aspired simply to be happy in life and in their careers. That happiness included the ability to pay off their student debt. Many others, if not all, were motivated by their blackness to role model success, disprove stereotypes, make inroads for others like them, and remove loved ones from hostile environments.

Someone told me when people that are from the city, when they make it and they make it big time, they move out of their communities and go to places like suburbs. So with me being a Black man from the average middle class neighborhood..., I want to be able to reside back in my city and make a change and show the youth there that I made it and [they] can make it as well. (Franklin)

Several students along with Franklin also aspired to be role models for future Black college students:

...We always advocated for our city to better the education that high school students in the public education setting should get. We wanted to be examples of students that could reach good education. (Franklin)

### **Institutional Factors**

Institutional factors consist of methodologies, policies, and structures that the institution has control over that may positively or negatively impact the student (Sedlacek, 1987). Some examples of this are affirmative action, teaching methods, cost of attendance, support services or lack thereof.

**Faculty/Staff Relations.** Several students demonstrated a high, positive level of faculty/staff interaction and relationship which creates a positive learning environment and fosters future opportunities. Byron stated, "I like my professors. I feel like I surprise

them. I always end up being one of the favorites.” Meanwhile another participant stated that he was proactive in his educational process.

Well I usually sit in the front so that I can hear people, know the teacher, and they can know me which really isn’t that hard because I’m usually the only Black person in my class. I get to know them. I say “Hi. How are you doing? I’m TaeRown.” Classes that I have a tough time in I usually visit their office hours and they know me by name. So I would say pretty good. (TaeRown)

Franklin also shared in this sentiment and explained his connection with faculty and staff across campus.

They are excellent. I have a diverse set of faculty and staff that I can collaborate with or ask questions to and it has just been amazing. I know I have a large range of professors that I could ask for a letter or recommendation from. A lot of people at this university, particularly faculty, know who I am which is a plus. (Franklin)

On the opposite end of the spectrum, some saw no need to make a connection with faculty and staff at all.

I don’t really have much of a relationship. I learned in one of my classes that first generation students have a hard time connecting with professors because they can’t do much for you. I don’t find it really hard to talk to a professor but I don’t see a need to be close to them because I change professors every semester and have like five different professors. I mean getting close to one and then I will probably never see them again... I just don’t see a need. (Andre)

The student in this case was also disconnected from the university socially and academically.

Other students treated the situation from a customer service or needs basis: “So far, I haven’t but I probably should because I’m going to need a recommendation” (Byron). At the same time, Byron stated that no faculty or staff had ever reached out to him.

Faculty and staff have also been found to display biased pedagogical methods and communications that are either insensitive or insulting to African American male students. These items include differential treatment, Eurocentric viewpoints, and low expectations. Jamal expressed his opinion:

In some of the curriculums when it talks about slavery and other stuff, I feel like it’s catered to a Caucasian viewpoint. We’re a predominantly White school but I think that a historically Black school would take the conversation a very different way. It’s weird because people always look to the black people in the class to see how they react and stuff. I think that a curriculum needs to be made that balances being informative and also being empathetic at the same time because a lot of it is just said directly. I’m not saying that you have to have sympathy but just know that people still go through this stuff. For them, it might not be as resolved as one might think. (Jamal)

A graduate student discussed his positive relationship with a faculty member because of her unconscious behavior toward him in class.

I have an awesome relationship with most faculty and staff...Even when there was problems with specific staff members, we have sat down and talked about it. I had an issue with [professor] when I felt like she was specifically picking on me multiple times calling me “stupid” and things of that nature and I sat with her and

gave her three examples of how she pulled me out in front of the class specifically and ignored my comments or ignored my questions. She almost got to the point of tears and I said that that was unacceptable. From then on, we've been great...

(Solomon)

Four participants expressed problems with the teaching or evaluation methods utilized in the classroom. Solomon's opinion is as follows:

I've had a couple of things happen where either a) there wasn't an openness with the faculty member so it felt like there was a disconnected between me and whoever the faculty member is whether they're male or female. I can't explain it but I'm going to the professor's office and I feel like I can't connect with you but you are able to connect with other students better or the standard for me is lower than other people in the room. So pandering to the communities. There has to be a balance because if you are praising me for getting 1+1 right but you're expecting Johnnie to get 88 times a million divided by six and he gets an okay but "[name] oh my god. Good job! You got that one right! You must have studied hard on that." I just think that there needs to be a positively intentional effort that needs to happen with faculty. (Solomon)

When asked if they have experienced any academic difficulties at GVSU, two participants commented on procrastination:

As everyone else has, procrastination but that is going to happen in college. Secondly, some of the general education classes because they're required like math and science courses, those are not my strongest areas. And also classes that were good topics but the professor didn't teach them well. (Franklin)

The second spoke about his dislikes connected to his procrastination:

I'm a procrastinator. The only bad grade I actually had in high school was language arts because I didn't like writing essays. It wasn't that I couldn't write essays. I just didn't like writing them. I feel like it's a waste of time. After we get done with this interview, I got an essay to go write that was due last week. I gotta turn it in by twelve o'clock. That's my only academic thingy that holds me back. I still get my work done. It just gets done at two o'clock in the morning. (Shawn)

Andre highlighted a conditioning experienced in K-12 that transferred to college:

Different teaching strategies from different professors. I like lecture classes rather than discussion class. I wouldn't really in a class setting discuss how I feel about specific topics. I don't really grasp much from that. I'd rather sit back and listen and absorb knowledge that way rather than talk about it if that makes sense.

(Andre)

He expanded on this opinion when probed further for the purpose of understanding his rationale. In short, he related it back to high school in which the teacher told the students what they needed to know, they took notes, and then they were tested on the notes taken. Classes like LIB 100, which are discussion based, have frustrated him.

Actually last year when I took LIB 100 I hated that class because you had to read and then come in with a perception about this and I did it to an extent. Every time I went to class it was frustrating because he asked questions about what you think and things and I didn't come here to know. This frustrated me because I didn't know. (Andre)

Andre's high school education has created a worker mentality over a boss mentality. It has conditioned him to be an intake agent but not an agent that produces creative thought, critical thinking, or any progressive mental processing to move beyond being a part in the machine instead of the creator of the machine.

Quincy, Xavier, and Solomon pointed to professors and staff treating them differently than other students. The treatment was seen as a race based disparity amongst the students that they interact with.

At a predominantly White institution there's just that thought that they are waiting for you to slip up or mess up something because you feel like that is what they expect of you or the other half that kind of babies or coddles you (them does not equal White people. It refers to society). (Quincy)

There are others (administrators) like [name] that will just use you for the community that you come from. They say things like "you're an African American male. You're a hot commodity in [this] field." She had no idea how I identify and this was my first time talking to her. (Solomon)

The sentiment of these students is either completely positive or relatively critical. What many of them speak of is a lack of cultural competency and education in various facets of the institution's inner workings. As previously stated, this trickles all the way down to the general student population. Numerous incidents have occurred in the lives of these students that have taught them whether or not to reach out to others, to protect themselves from mental/emotional harm, what to be and what not to be. This is directly related to their social, psychosocial, and educational well-being.

**Education at GVSU.** The GPAs of the participants from high school to college and high school to graduate school are displayed in Tables 8 and 9. As explained previously both graduate students and undergraduate students saw an overall drop in GPA points. A more drastic decrease is seen amongst undergraduate students than graduate students. In the case of the graduate students, two of the three showed positive GPA point gains but the third demonstrated a GPA point decrease from high school to graduate school substantial enough to create a negative high school to graduate school GPA differential average for all graduate students represented.

This negative differential may be representative of students' preparedness prior to attending college. One participant sums up his concerns regarding the balance between diversifying a campus and ensuring that those students considered "diverse" are actually prepared for entry.

I feel like a lot of African American students that come to college come not as prepared as other students and I think that's representative of the public education system. Then I feel like a lot of schools are now focusing more on diversity than actually preparing students. I do understand that sometimes African American students come from broken public education systems might need lax admissions requirements and things like that but we need to help them be able to stay at the university and provide those resources. (Terrance)

Another student explained the importance of education in a metaphorical manner that equated to adding credence to his person which would hopefully force others to look past his race. The term he used was "grey scale."

I guess in a strange way I like pursuing academic success as an African American. I am comfortable with who I am but I feel like academics backs it up. On a piece of paper, there's the listing of things, but when you have something to show for it, it almost makes everything go grey scale. It becomes less about who you are, more about what you can do so I feel... like academics makes the argument for myself just a little bit stronger. Don't define me by things that I can't control and things that make me who I am. Define me by what I can do and what I have done. I don't agree with the system but you have to play ball. (Khamari)

**Housing.** Students had both on and off campus living arrangements. Graduate students were most likely to live off campus. Most undergraduates lived on campus. Some had experience with both on and off campus living at Grand Valley. On campus living was deemed more of a convenience. Several students said it was a positive addition to their social lives.

I would say on campus you get to be involved in more. I have more friends than people off campus would because I'm always over [at] my friend's house. I'm hardly at home. If I am it is to like sleep and eat. I'm always hanging with my friends. We're in Kleiner constantly. I would say that it brightened my social life. (Darryl)

Other students highlighted its impact on their academic achievement.

I feel like it helped the academic side a lot. It's doing too much to live off campus. I like to spend time in the library. I leave the library late at night so I just walk back to my dorm or apartment on campus. (Byron)

Another compared and contrasted his experience on campus with friends who lived off campus in their freshman year. He also expressed some real world ideals instilled in on-campus living that could also be garnered off campus.

...You actually experience the “college life.” I feel like I meet new people every day... you know more about what is going on... I have friends from last year who didn’t live on campus and...they were basically...just down the street...in their apartment all of the time so...when stuff went on on-campus they weren’t there because they didn’t know things were going on... If you’re coming to any campus, you should at least stay on campus...freshman year...just being put into a situation where you have to live with a lot of different people... to be on a college campus and to live and go to school and stuff away from home; I feel that everybody should experience it. (Andre)

On the contrary, living off campus had both its perks and drawbacks. Many participants expressed a difference in off campus and on campus living on the basis of convenience, cost, and real world experience.

Moving off campus just made me be a lot more independent because on campus you just pay Grand Valley. You don’t have to worry about utilities or anything else. It’s just the one lump sum. And you don’t really even pay it. When you pay for Grand Valley Housing you kind of just pay your tuition; it’s a one stop shop but moving off, you have to make sure that your utilities are paid, whose name is it going to be in. It builds independence. (Terrance)

One particular participant discussed the need to expand beyond Allendale in his experience.

When I needed to learn how to live on my own and pay bills. I needed to be in the city and actually have other connections beside the bubble of Allendale. So my junior year is when I switched to being off campus in my first off campus apartment... I've been off campus living downtown or in the Alpine area ever since. (Solomon)

### **Student Recommendations**

Participants either had several recommendations for change for Grand Valley, its faculty, administrators, and academic services, or none at all.

**False advertisement at GVSU.** Feedback for GVSU as an institution in regards to better supporting African American men suggested that GVSU stop falsely claiming that it is diverse. The following commentaries are reflective of what is perceived as false advertisement and not representative of the racial makeup of campus.

I have actually heard someone say this when the graduating seniors in high schools come over here for a visit of Grand Valley,...Grand Valley makes it look as if it is this diverse place but in actuality there may be some instances where they are in the classroom and they're the only brown person in there. So I wonder if they are bringing this kind of news to these incoming high school students who will become future freshmen here. (Franklin)

Two others stated and joked about not admitting any more White people and getting more Black people to deal with the issue of representation while another specifically points to advertising and marketing as a point of incorporation.

For me it would be incorporating us more into the brochure and the website. Most of the time when they send the brochure to houses, we see White people. We

know that it is a White school but kind of put us in there too to let us know that we are welcome like they say that we are. (Darryl)

Another participant explained his concerns with the way that GVSU advertises to its students and what he sees as the consequences and repercussions of that advertisement amongst the Grand Valley community when it comes to programming.

Stop addressing us as if we are something different. I would like to see more programs that just pull everyone together...I'm always a little weary when it is "hey Black kid, show up to this." Meanwhile for a "White" event all they have to say is show up to it. No one goes "White Grand Valley students, we're having things." ...I feel like when you designate them a "Black" thing, it discourages non-Black students from getting involved and divides us further... I feel like Grand Valley is being racially discriminatory by separating everyone from each other and letting the other groups know that the other groups exist...When you separate us, we become a study. When we become a study, we become a science. Once it becomes a science, you get really distant and I think that that is what is happening at this school. Potential growth in the "us" and "them" mentality that GVSU seems to foster. (Khamari)

Partnerships or mentorship was another large area in which participants expressed room for change and progress.

I feel like mentorship is the main thing... if you're a first generation college student your parents don't necessarily understand the college life and the struggle. Even with my parents, my mom worked part time and went to school so she still doesn't understand the whole going to school and being away, being on your own

and having to call home and things like that... A lot of students feel like they're alone so having somebody that you feel actually understands what you're going through... that definitely determines your success. (Terrance)

Other students have expressed a need for more support financially:

Where is the money? You understand that to get us, you're going to have to pay for it because the ones that you could get, you're not willing to pay for because you don't have any financial aid. And yes we do have things like the ending of Proposal 2, Affirmative Action. However, they can actually go through a third party system and go through foundations that can actually charter the scholarships. I don't understand why that's not happening. So point one is, you need to start showing us the money. (Solomon)

Academic support was also an area of concern. Terrance said this:

Just be more creative in how you offer services to students because I feel like needing a tutor for example, is a confidence thing. You think you need a tutor so a lot of students think "oh, I'm stupid because I need a tutor." Come to classrooms and explain how the academic success center works or things like that. Yes, we have it but what does it actually mean? What do you actually do? What do you have to offer? Yes, we have these services but nobody really knows about them. Of course, students aren't always going to proactively seek them, which they should, but it takes both ends of the spectrum. (Terrance)

**Faculty/staff and administrators.** Participants desired faculty, staff, and administrators who genuinely care, are of similar background or origin, and are doing things to make change on their behalf. Faculty, particularly amongst graduate students,

was encouraged to set a “positive standard” which meant consistent expectations for all students regardless of race during the evaluation process. There is also a desire for faculty, staff, and administrators to become more culturally competent in order to better service African American male students at Grand Valley.

I think that faculty could as much as possible not try to show any instances of bias or racial prejudice. I don't know exactly how many non-white individuals have experienced any sort of biased incident on professors' behalf but I just hope that with these professors they'll understand that when they have people in their classrooms that are non-white and they're probably the only one that that student may be, not paranoid, but very aware of their surroundings. So they may be less likely to speak out in class and participate. I believe that if this happens, they will recognize that they are the only non-white individual in the classroom. If the professor sees anything that may be off, they can always encourage that particular student to speak to them. (Franklin)

A common sore area with participants was the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA). Students either felt that the office was pointless, unrepresentative of whom they are, or did not serve them as a minority student.

...We have a multicultural office. I thought that was pretty cool. I don't use it. I don't know why I would. I'm comfortable with who I am and I don't tend to look at people in life as Black, White, Asian. I look at them as human beings. (Jamal)

A graduate student was much more critical when he broke down his opinion on OMA.

...I feel like having an Office of Multicultural Affairs that does absolutely nothing for the African American community is a joke. You do things for the outside

community like these decent public speakers who come in. Who is here to impact the students? How many African American and Hispanic students are actually coming into the OMA office? How many partnerships are you actually doing with student organizations? What are you doing here on campus besides three cohorts that are fading every single day? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. (Solomon)

This same student suggested that OMA be the funneling point for students of color at the institution when it comes to integration, partnerships, etc.

Quincy specifically looked at representation in faculty and administrators. He commented on the current positions that African American men are in and the need for them to be utilized in a better way.

One thing is to get some real African American male administrators. Grand Valley has these African American males in positions to support but not in positions to lead. Being an African American male, I am glad that they are here to support but I would feel more empowered if there were African American males in positions of power that was a leading front for the university... I came from a predominantly White university where Black men are leading the show. (Quincy)

**Academic services.** One third of the participants provided suggestions for academic services. Franklin suggested that first generation college students and people of color be encouraged to utilize their resources on campus. A different participant wanted academic services to be creative in their provision of services.

I feel like needing a tutor for example is a confidence thing. You think you need a tutor so a lot of students think “oh, I’m stupid because I need a tutor.” Come to classrooms and explain how the academic success center works or things like that.

Yes we have it but what does it actually mean? What do you actually do? What do you have to offer? Yes we have these services but nobody really knows about them. Of course, students aren't always going to proactively seek them which they should but it takes both ends of the spectrum. (Terrance)

### **Summary**

Social, psychosocial, and institutional factors were perceived in large part by the participants as affecting their academic achievement both positively and negatively. Twelve students fitting the criterion of African American, enrolled at Grand Valley, and over 18 years old participated in the study (four graduates, three seniors, three sophomores, and two freshmen). Their demographic information is located in Table 7.

Social factors played a large role in the students' academic achievement. The major findings in this area were in relation to unpreparedness (K-12) and socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status played into the financial strain or lack thereof that a student experienced when attending GVSU. Many, if not all, student participants were widely utilizing federal student loans. Some were fortunate enough to have received scholarships, grants, and/or an assistantship that has assisted them in paying for their education. Several also expressed a concern with money in the future when attempting to attain further higher education.

Despite the raised high school GPAs that were reported, the majority of participants saw a decrease in GPA points from high school to undergraduate and from high school to graduate school. The K-12 system in the cities that these students were from were not the best, however they have persevered and become successful college students in their own right.

Psychosocial factors were affected mainly by a motivation to prove others wrong. Students mentioned experiencing stereotype threat and minority status stressors. Examples ranged from a hyperawareness of being Black to microaggressions and racial ignorance while on campus. These experiences with MSS and stereotype threat were occurred in all aspects of college life which for some was a positive motivator and for others a large scale challenge. The students had a desire to achieve great things for themselves but they also had a motivation not to be what society classified them as (stereotype threat).

Environmental incongruency which is directly connected to MSS was exhibited by all but one student. Their home towns, cities, and high schools were much more diverse than Grand Valley's student population. About 83% of participants had high degree aspirations equating to a doctorate degree. Two stated that they might seek further education if it were necessary to reach their end goal in life.

The sense of belonging and involvement of a student was very evident in the comments made and a student's social, academic, and professional involvements and interactions on campus. Students tended to be located at one extreme or the other: very involved or disconnected. Those that were involved on campus and in student organizations expressed how this integrated them into campus, forced them to keep their grades up, and worked with them to remain successful. Others chose not to get involved at all. Some saw no need to get involved. Others stated that they were only here to get their degrees and leave. Sense of belonging was also based on their experiences with others at the institution. The climate at times became murky after students experienced

minority status stressors or stereotype threat at the hands of faculty, staff, administrators, and students.

Institutional factors, like social factors, played a key role in the academic success of the participants. Faculty and staff relationships either were good, non-existent, or progressing. Students discussed their connections on campus or their lack thereof. Some students had relationships that were improving after some confrontation regarding racial insensitivity. Students found some faculty and staff members to be biased in their teaching methods as well as the way that they evaluate students of color. Teaching methods were described as Eurocentric and non-inclusive. Many students, however, had at least one mentor while those that were less connected did not.

The GPAs of the students were good for college and graduate school. However, the differences in high school and undergraduate or graduate GPA showed a negative differential. The differential of undergraduate students was more substantial than that of graduate students. One graduate student's large differential converted the overall graduate student differential to a negative as well.

Education was seen by most as a means by which to add credence to each individual given the bad reputation held by African American men. It was seen as forcing others to evaluate them based on what they have done and what they are capable of as opposed to the color of their skin or their name.

On-campus and off-campus living were compared and contrasted by the participants. Participants described on-campus living as convenient, great for their social life and a means by which to stay connected with programming and activities. Despite this, on-campus living was deemed expensive while off-campus living was seen as more

affordable. Off-campus living was described as a step toward adulthood in which one is forced to learn real world skills like paying bills and time management. Only one participant cross-referenced what some may see as skills learned off campus with skills that can be learned on campus. Off-campus was also seen as a means by which to network with a greater population outside of the university.

Lastly, research subjects provided recommendations for institutional change, to faculty and staff, administrators, and academic services. Most suggestions revolved around mentorship and partnership, representation of African American male role models in positions of power, utilization of campus offices and resources more productively, and providing more creative, intentional support for African American male students at Grand Valley.

The next chapter will summarize the study in its entirety; discuss the findings in relation to Critical Race Theory and previous literature; and provide recommendations for practice as well as recommendations for future studies on this topic.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

### **Summary of the Study**

This exploratory study sought to unearth the experiences of African American male students attending Grand Valley State University. The need for this study arose because African American men constitute a disproportionately small portion of the university population when compared to their representation in society. Furthermore, GVSU's recent climate study included negative commentaries from students of color and minority groups on campus. Despite this, there is a lack of research on the lived experiences of Black men at GVSU.

Black women and White men achieve academic success at a much higher rate than Black men. Ideally, Black men should be represented proportionately to their representation in the greater population. Retention of these students should be a primary responsibility. However successful retention has not been the case at Grand Valley compared to other groups.

The two research questions that guided this study were:

(1) What are the social, psychosocial, and institutional experiences of African American males at Grand Valley?

(2) What implications do the findings present for Grand Valley?

The research design consisted of semi-structured interview questions aimed at uncovering the experiences, both positive and negative, of African American male students at GVSU.

Volunteers who fit the following criterion were selected to participate in this study: African American male, 18 and older, and currently attending Grand Valley State

University. A qualitative methodology was utilized to examine the African American experience at GVSU. Audio recordings were manually transcribed and coded, with codes being refined during the data analysis process. The data analysis resulted in 35 codes, 10 categories, and three themes.

### **Discussion**

Social factors, for example socioeconomic status, pre-college achievement, and home life, are not controlled by the student or the institution (Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones, & Allen, 2010). However, they were found to be interconnected. According to CRT, the ability to own property, which was once a White only privilege, along with the allocation of school funding based on property taxes, illustrates a connection between White privilege and the state of these students' cities and high schools (Kozol, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1998). There also exists a construction in which "urban" equals Black which is subordinated by "suburban" which equals White therefore city and public school education are seen as less valuable (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Broken public school systems educated many of these participants typically leading to inadequate preparation for college and university assignments. All of this discussion comes back to the tenets of CRT and how historical contexts are replicated in today's society to continue to disadvantage minority populations.

SES, home and school environments, and the unpreparedness of the students in the study according to CRT can be attributed to the issues of property taxes, White flight, and the construction of whiteness as property. Property taxes amongst the 50 states typically dictate the funding that schools receive. On the other hand, departure of Whites in droves from urban areas to suburban areas removes a substantial amount of money

from the original community. The “them” and “us” mentality creates a rationale for this behavior. Furthermore, whiteness seen as property unattainable by those of color creates a hierarchy in society with African Americans being located at the bottom of the totem pole. Even more disturbing is the interest convergence that occurs to keep Whites in particular areas thus disadvantaging Blacks and people of color in the process. The notion that marginalized groups should pull themselves up by their bootstraps, work hard, and they will succeed allows the privileged to disregard the role that they play in perpetuating social inequity while neglecting self-examination. Minorities buy into this reasoning and those that make it become “norm” thus justifying the current state of the majority of marginalized society. Racism in itself is engrained into society and used to maintain the status quo. Despite the support of CRT, I conclude that there was enough savvy and drive between students interviewed and their families to get them to where they are today.

Although the students in this study are in college, they heavily rely on student loans in order to gain access and accept that debt is a part of their reality. Understanding the opportunities garnered through education and the reward received upon graduation in both a personal, emotional, and collectivistic sense propels the participants forward. The downside is that they have to incur the negative of debt to gain the positive of the degree and its opportunities.

According to Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010), psychosocial factors are defined as “the important issues people face as their lives progress, such as how to define themselves, their relationship with others, and what to do with their lives” (p. 42). For the purpose of this study, social psychology emphasizes “the thought, feeling,

and behavior of individuals" as shaped by the "actual, imagined, or implied presence of others" (Jones, 1998).

Psychosocial factors like minority status stressors were both motivators and drawbacks. They were far more impactful in the lives of these students. Microaggressions, microinsults, microassaults, racial ignorance, differential treatment, and racial isolation overwhelmingly permeated their experiences at GVSU. Steele (2003) coined the term "stereotype threat" which is "the threat of being viewed through a lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype" (p. 253). Steele asserted that this problem manifests more in high achieving African Americans than low achieving African Americans. Stereotype threat negatively affected the performance of high achieving Blacks because they were trying too hard whereas low achieving Blacks when faced with difficult tasks tended to give up or complete the task with little care resulting in low scores. This particular MSS was expressed so much so that students were willing to dismiss a piece of their identity to get away from it. The need to wear armor to deflect MSS and always portray one's self in light of what others deem as normal or acceptable is stressful, tiring, and it wears minorities down (battle fatigue).

CRT purports that the subordination and vilification of minorities has allowed whiteness to flourish in its privilege. It also has intentionally given African Americans, in particular, a bad reputation that must be contended against in all realms of life. An example of this is White owned television shows which claim to be "reality TV" that shine a negative light on Black people and other minorities. A participant said it best when he stated that one act by a Black student becomes what all Black students on

campus do whereas White people reap the benefit of not being the villain or [insert adjective here]. Counter-storytelling, however, allows reality to be named by the person telling the story thus giving voice to the marginalized and challenging what dominant culture asserts as truth. Davis (1994) claimed that Black students at PWIs suffer from more psychosocial harms and that these dilemmas display themselves in the academic performance of students.

The experiences of these African American men can be explained by CRT's tenets of interest convergence, whiteness as property, racism as permanent, and counter-storytelling. Having diversity on campus benefits the institution and the White students who attend that institution (interest convergence). Despite this, effective intercultural or cross-cultural training or experiences are not being fostered. Students are also forced to forge their own pathways and inroads because the institution has been missing the mark. This may not be the case for White students that are legacy or know someone at the institution beforehand. Therefore admitting Black students to a PWI provides more benefits to White people and the institution than to Black people and minorities. In many ways desegregation teaches minorities to know their place and aspire to the standards of White people.

Microaggressive behavior although usually unconscious reinforces the notion of whiteness as a property asset, valuable, and a standard of the norm. This will never be attainable to GVSU's Black students and its White students may never be racialized by society. One student specifically seemed to disassociate himself from blackness and the stereotype threat that comes with it. Reflecting on Kozol (1992), this hierarchy has assisted in the creation of those that are worth it and those that are less than human as

seen through the eyes on this young man and society. Critical Race Theory supports this rationale in that the treatment of African Americans in the past has transcended into the present in which we look to be something else and look to identify as something different in order to not be the thing society deems as worthless. According to Solórzano et al. (2000), microaggressions affect the academic and social life of students which lead the creation of counterspaces.

Counterspaces are used to combat racism and deal with microaggressive behavior. It affords marginalized students the opportunity to tell their stories and provides them with a voice (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995, Solórzano et al., 2000). It also helps students connect to those with similar opinions, experiences, and backgrounds. They therefore create a safe space for themselves and in some ways become isolated. This can be seen in race specific student organizations, courses, and cubby spaces in Kirkhof. This isolation was expressed by at least two of the participants in the study.

Although MSS and stereotype threat were frustrating for the participants and studies show that these experiences depress academic performance (Solórzano et al., 2000), both motivated participants to be the best that they could be, become providers for their families, and fight all modes of conformation or perpetuation of the stereotypes of African American men and Black people all together. They wanted to be examples to others, become great in life, and attain relatively high levels of education. These are standard desires previously reserved for White society that have been afforded to “Others” (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995; Solórzano et al., 2000).

By role modeling to those at home, they hope for future progress. By becoming the one that made it, participants demonstrate the ability to successfully navigate the system and break the bonds for other Black students. White is what is valued but these Black students are trying to demonstrate to their racial group and others that Black is also desirable. They cannot change their race. Racism is strong in our society. However, proper in-group representations of Black can be used to progress Black and combat White portrayals of blackness. Black students are a unique situation in that they went from property with no rights to humans with few rights (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). The era of few human rights and civil liberties is still upon us.

When degree aspirations have been explored, it has been shown that if Black males have higher ambitions they tend to earn higher grades in college and persist for longer time periods (Davis, 1994; Strayhorn, 2008). The majority of participants had high degree aspirations, but they exhibited behaviors with the ability to hinder their achievement of goals. Procrastination, boredom, peer influences, and a dislike of aspects within the course surfaced among the participants.

Davis (1994) remarked that African American males at PWIs who studied harder, obtained stronger peer relationships and held a positive view of institutional support were not guaranteed higher levels of achievement. This is in line with the Effort-Outcome Gap (EOG)-the result of having to put forth more effort in attempting to compensate for a pervasive combination of academic and institutional barriers to educational success” (Greene et al., 2008, p. 529). Involved participants stated that their involvements had directly impacted their academics and professional opportunities. Their extracurricular activities tended to encompass their majors or professional goals or had a GPA

requirement that they had to uphold. By doing this, they gain support from sources within the community that could assist them in attaining their end goal of a degree, employment, or other prospect. An anomaly noted that the effect was negative and he had to drop out organizations not related to his major or work.

Contrary to CRT, the interest of Black students in this situation is fulfilled while also allowing Whites to benefit from the presence and interaction with diversity. Lack of institutional connections hinders academic success, promotes isolation, and creates counterspaces where Black students tend to garner support (Solórzano et al., 2000). Students either felt properly represented or not represented at all at the university although there was near consensus that Grand Valley is trying and making efforts toward better representing African American men. The majority of them would choose Grand Valley again if given the option to do it over. They either like the institution overall or see value in their hardships while moving into the future.

Studies note that at PWIs, Black male students encounter a hostile environment, are discriminated against, do not feel integrated into the campus community, and confront several other negativities which may thwart their aspirations for success in higher education (Carson, 2009; Cuyjet, 1997; Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984; Greene, Marti, & McClenney, 2008). This finding was confirmed by some students that were disconnected from the institution.

Finally, institutional factors like faculty characteristics, Eurocentric climate, campus support, student-faculty relations, and peer relations played another integral role in the academic success of participants. High school GPA, undergraduate GPA, and graduate GPA demonstrated a GPA decrease amongst both undergraduates and graduate

students (see Table 9). Again, this in relation to CRT goes back to the relationship between White privilege and power and Black subordination.

There were several critiques of and negative experiences with faculty, staff, and administrators. Examples include teaching strategies, low expectations, and lack of commitment to diversity and cultural competency. This stems from the creation of cultural norms, curriculums, instruction, and assessment centered in the White experience (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Black faculty are few and far between therefore they are not in positions to effect change (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Based on the experiences of the participants, faculty have been using a deficit model in their education to “deal with” Black students and students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998). New research, however, looks at teachers’ understanding of “the saliency of race in education and society, and it underscores the need to make racism explicit so that students can recognize and struggle against this particular form of oppression” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 19). Lastly, participants suggested several recommendations for faculty, staff, administrators, and academic services.

Recommendations from the participants covered a range of areas. A primary area of concern was the cultural competency of faculty, staff, and administrators. This ranged from in the classroom experiences to brochures and advertisement. A secondary concern was mentorship and partnerships between professionals of color and students of color. Having a role model and mentor provides a connection with the university and personal connect to someone who understands what you are going through. A final prevalent concern was with the utilization or lack thereof of the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

Multiculturalism in itself is disliked by some CRT theorists because it is seen as “a political philosophy of “many cultures” existing in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance” (Ladson –Billings, & Tate, 1995, p. 61). This affected students and faculty outside of the classroom. Today, multiculturalism is equated to diversity which is a term used to encompass all difference amongst people. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) stated that “...as critical race theory scholars, [they] unabashedly reject a paradigm that attempts to be everything to everyone and consequently becomes nothing for anyone, allowing the status quo to prevail” (p. 62). They believe any program to combat oppression must be intentionally and primarily constructed around race.

### **Conclusion**

The major conclusions drawn from this research are that MSS is very salient on campus, these Black men want to be successful and accepted, and GVSU has much work to do in regards to recruitment and retention.

First, minority status creates a spotlight effect at Grand Valley. Anything not accepted as the norm or the mainstream becomes an alien and is treated as such. The university does not know how to appropriately address students of color and it is felt by the recipients of social advertisements, programming, interactions, and with academics. This also creates a disconnect between students of color, the institution, and the larger campus community. Steele’s experiment demonstrates that stereotype threat is an important factor in the academic success of students.

Second, although African American males are underrepresented, they work diligently to reach what society deems as the acceptable norm (socially constructed). They reject society’s construction of blackness and attempt to create their own meanings

in life (counter-storytelling). Despite their different stories, they main united at the university under the identity of African American male. CRT asserts that race is a social construct and White people have continuously wielded the power to subordinate Black people and blackness (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billing, 1998; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). Whiteness has been constructed as the ultimate property asset which is unattainable to the “Other” in society (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). Although these students strive to meet society’s norm, they recognize the negativities and obstacles associated with their race. Despite this, they forge ahead toward graduation and future endeavors in hopes of gaining some of the privileges historically afford to White society.

Finally, Grand Valley as an institution has much work to do in becoming intentional in its recruitment and retention of African American male students. Interest convergence has negatively impacted the experience that Grand Valley creates for these students. For example, the participants felt that Grand Valley portrays itself as a diverse institution despite its PWI status and fosters/promotes programming and events aimed toward Black people and minorities. Black students are given the impression that GVSU is diverse and exposed to diverse populations internal and external to the institution but are left wondering as the school year progresses. They are the only Black face in class, experience stereotype threat and MSS, and are not expected to excel. They are a number that benefits the student profile of Grand Valley.

While the university and its White students profit from the presence of Black male students, the students themselves suffer because of this interest. Desegregation and integration have served as means by which to enrich the lives of Whites while doing little

to better the lives of minorities (Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Although the majority of the students interviewed had high GPAs, several of them were disconnected. A few would not choose Grand Valley again given their experience, and others have had to fight to survive in and pay for college.

The Office of Multicultural Affairs in particular does not seem to serve the purpose students derive from its name. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), “multicultural education has been conceptualized as a reform movement designed to effect change in the “school and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and other social-class groups will experience educational equality” (p. 61). However, this has been expanded to sexual orientation, gender, and ability. GVSU has departments or offices that address all of these latter issues. Unfortunately, in today’s society multiculturalism boils down to experiences with food, dance, and song for example. The true issue at the heart of social justice goes unaddressed in this type of education.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

First, as an institution, Grand Valley should consider campaigns, private parties, or creative budget allocation to provide Black students with more financial assistance. Financial strain and extensive student debt for Black student should be minimized if possible. I recommend this preference be given because blackness is equivalent to disadvantage in the greater society (racism as inherent, whiteness as property, critique of liberalism, interest convergence).

Second, connections with faculty, staff, administrators, and student affairs professionals play an integral role in the recruitment and retention of African American

students at PWIs. Although there are institutional members that are expressly devoted to programs, student organizations, and advising of African American students, it is not enough to direct them to the Education Support Program, Brothers and predominantly Black student organizations within the institution. Contact and commitment to these groups creates a sense of belonging and purpose (Carson, 2009). However, students need to be able to identify with, connect with, and learn from similar people. This may mean that GVSU should be intentionally and vigorously looking to recruit faculty and staff of color. This is not to say that it would be impossible for non-Black faculty and administrators to successfully assist and retain these students. It means that there needs to be a supplemental or complementary relationship between African American faculty and staff, non-Black faculty and staff, and students. Inclusion in this way demonstrates that GVSU is looking at the best interest of the students and not itself (reverse interest convergence). It also means that the institution has placed true value on marginalized people and what they bring to the table (all ethnicities as valuable).

Third, the institution might consider building social justice into its mission, vision, and values. This may help to alleviate the minority status stress and stereotype threat felt by African American male students and perceivably other students of color. When the institution and all of its intricacies commits to a change, it can occur more easily and should infiltrate the mainstream student body. This is indicative at universities and colleges across the nation with much more diversity. Examples of effectively embedding and embodying diversity in an institution's mission, vision, values, and actions can be seen at Texas State University and San Diego State University which are high diversity institutions.

Lastly, true appreciation for race and a real understanding of cultural competency need to be promoted at all levels of the institution. It should come through in social and academic programming, in the classroom, and be manifested in conversations across campus. This can create a more welcoming environment for students of color which would change the dynamic in regards to MSS and stereotype thereat. It may also increase the ability to have open dialogue on race among all stakeholders at the institution. Interest convergence would be turned on its head because marginalized groups and Whites would benefit overall and it is not a one sided venture. It could create a body of privileged people who better understand and have been exposed to counter-storytelling which has caused some self-examination over their time at Grand Valley. Until there is true meaning for both Whites and the oppressed in institutional policy and practice, CRT purports that its five tenet, racism as inherent, counter-stories, critique of liberalism, interest convergence, and whiteness as property will continue to prevail.

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## Appendix A

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Main question	Additional probes if necessary
<b>Demographics</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your age?</li> <li>• What year are you?</li> <li>• Which college are you enrolled in at GVSU?</li> <li>• What is your college GPA, if applicable?</li> </ul>	<p>Freshman   Sophomore   Junior   Senior            Senior+   Master's   Doctoral   Post-            Doctoral</p> <p>(i.e., CLAS, COE, etc.)</p> <p>CLAS   CCPS   COE   SCB   BCIS            CHP   CEC</p>
<b>Family education background</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you tell me a little about the home or neighborhood you come from?</li> <li>• How did your family shape your views on education?</li> </ul>	<p>Are you a first generation college student?</p> <p>If not, how many in your family have at least a bachelor's degree? How has this affected your desire for higher education?</p>
<b>Prior schooling</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What type of school did you attend?</li> <li>• Where are your friends now?</li> </ul>	<p>How would you describe the racial composition of your high school?</p> <p>What was your high school GPA?</p> <p>What was the role of peers in shaping your views on education?</p>
<b>Campus Involvement</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you live on or off campus?</li> <li>• What extracurricular activities, clubs, and organizations, if any, are you involved in?</li> </ul>	<p>How has that affected your experience?</p> <p>How has this involvement contributed to your academic achievement?</p>
<b>Institutional factors/faculty relations</b>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What can you tell me about your relationship with faculty at GVSU?</li> </ul>	<p>What has helped your relationships with faculty?</p> <p>What has hindered your relationships with faculty?</p>
<b>Financial</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are you funding your education?</li> <li>• How would you describe the effects of your concerns with money on your academic achievement and goals of degree attainment?</li> </ul>	<p>Are you here on scholarship? Paying for your education by yourself?</p> <p>Utilizing loans? Have monetary support from family? Combination?</p>
<b>Degree aspirations</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the highest degree you would like to attain?</li> <li>• How long did/will it take to complete your bachelor's degree?</li> <li>• Have you experienced any academic difficulties at GVSU? Please explain or give examples.</li> </ul>	<p>What are some factors that might affect your ability to achieve your goals?</p> <p>How did you try to remedy it?</p> <p>What was the result?</p> <p>How would you define academic success?</p> <p>In what ways has being African American affected your desire for higher education and academic success as a college student?</p>
<b>Minority status stressors</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you had to describe what it's like to be an African American college student at a predominantly White university, how would you describe it?</li> <li>• If you had to choose a college all over again, would you still choose Grand Valley?</li> </ul>	<p>Do you feel as if you are properly represented on Grand Valley's campus? Why or why not?</p> <p>To what extent do you feel like you are part of the larger campus community?</p> <p>Do you believe that being an African American college student at a predominantly White university has an impact on your academic success? Explain why or why not.</p> <p>In what ways, if at all, have you encountered any racial prejudice or racial</p>

	discrimination at this university?
<b>Recommendations for GVSU</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What could Grand Valley do differently in regards to supporting African American male college students?</li> </ul>	What could faculty do? What could administrators do? What could academic services do? Etc.

## Appendix B

### Carson' (2009) Interview Questions

What are your purposes for attending college? How did those purposes or goals come to be?

What was the role of family in shaping your views? Did family members attend college?

What was the role of peers in shaping your views?

How would you define academic success?

If you experienced academic difficulty in a particular class, what steps would you take to remedy it?

How would you define your role as a student?

In what ways has being African American affected your desire for higher education and your success as a college student?

If you had to describe what it's like to be an African American college student at a predominantly white university, what would you say?

Does the fact that you are an African American college student at a predominantly white university have any impact on your academic success? How?

To what extent do you feel like you are part of the larger campus community?

What extra-curricular activities, if any are you involved in? How has this involvement contributed to your academic achievement?

In what ways, if at all, have you encountered any racial/ethnic discrimination at this university?

What observations can you make about the level of unity within the African American undergraduate population?

Appendix C

Institutional Analysis Approval



November 7, 2012

Reba Oguntokun  
College Student Affairs Leadership  
Grand Valley State University

Reba,

I will provide means for email communication for the following research project:

*The African American/Black Male Experience at Grand Valley State University:  
Implications for the Future*

Principal investigator(s) – Reba Oguntokun

Invitee population – random sample of 50 black or African American male students  
aged 18 or older

Nature and timing of contact – One invitation and one reminder message per invitee,  
both sent via email during 2012-13 academic year. Content of messages must be  
exactly as approved by HRRC.

Random sampling will be accomplished by identifying all currently enrolled students who meet the inclusion criteria (self-identified as male and “Black or African American”; birthdate at least 18 years before sampling date), then generating a pseudo-random number using SAS software for each qualifying record. Qualifying records with the 50 smallest random values will be selected. The e-mail addresses associated with the selected records will not be released directly to you, but will be used to distribute your messages from a GVSU mail server.

This use of the data is in compliance with both FERPA and GVSU policies.

Philip Batty  
Director, Office of Institutional Analysis

## Appendix D

### Letter emailed by Institutional Analysis

Dear Student,

You have been randomly selected for invitation to participate in a research study. This research will examine the experiences of African American male students at GVSU. Participation in this study is voluntary. Only 20 students will be selected to participate in the study. The first 20 students to respond will be placed on a list in the order in which they reply. Those responding after the first 20 will be placed on an alternates list. Priority will be given to allow for a more even academic status distribution.

Your identity will be protected by using pseudonyms and not utilizing any information that may link you to the study. Interviews will last 45-60 minutes and will only occur one time during the fall or winter semester. If you would like to participate or would like more information about the study, please contact Reba Oguntokun at 616-331-1056 or via email at [reba.oguntokun@gmail.com](mailto:reba.oguntokun@gmail.com).

**Note:** Reba Oguntokun does not have access to your personal information. This communication is being disseminated via the Office of Institutional Analysis at GVSU. If you have no interest in this study, Reba will never know your name or any information about you. However, voluntary correspondence with Reba regarding this study negates this information block.

## Appendix E

### Informed Consent Form

#### **Introduction**

This research study is being conducted by Reba Oguntokun, a Master's of Education student at Grand Valley State University. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of African American/Black male students at Grand Valley State University. You are invited to participate in this study because you self-identified as African American/Black on your college application. I am interested in learning about your experiences at GVSU.

#### **Procedures**

You will be asked a series of interview questions, some having follow-up questions. These questions will cover information about your background, your previous education, and your experiences at Grand Valley. The interview will last 45-60 minutes and will take place in Pew Living Center study room or another appropriate location. If you permit, the interview may be recorded via audio tape. The audiotaping is being done to ensure that I can accurately record your words. Once I have transcribed the audiotape, it will be deleted. If at any time you do not want to answer a particular question, feel free to skip it.

#### **Confidentiality**

Your identity will be kept confidential in all reports. Neither your name nor any identifying data will be used. However, since the African American/ Black male population is small, others who read the final report may try to guess at your identity. To avoid this, I will not state your course of study, academic status, or any other information that may allow others to link you with a pseudonym. If fewer than four enrolled participants share a specific set of demographic characteristics, as a set these will not be included in any report of study results to protect participant privacy.

All data (recorder, transcripts, notes) retrieved from interviews will be kept on a password protected computer or in a locked drawer on campus. The researcher, advisor, HRRC and other university officials may have access to the data from this study for the purpose of protecting participants' rights and welfare, as needed. Data not related to the Human Research Review Committee's approval will be destroyed once the study is complete. After transcription and analysis of the taped data, the audio recording will be destroyed.

#### **Risks/Discomforts**

There are minimal risks if you choose to participate in this study. However, you may feel uncomfortable or experience some anxiety when disclosing your thoughts and feelings about Grand Valley. You may experience this even after the interview is over. Contact information for the researcher will be made available. Information for the Counseling Center will also be made available. I can escort you to the Counseling Center if you would like.

**Benefits**

While there may not be direct or immediate benefits to the participant, I hope that your insight will enlighten us about the experiences of African American/Black male students at Grand Valley. These insights might be helpful to administrators at GVSU who seek to find ways to serve African American/Black male students.

**Compensation**

There is no compensation for participation in this research study.

**Participation**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and only open to males who self-report on their college application as Black or African American and enrolled in courses at Grand Valley. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely. All interviews will take place in Pew Living Center or another appropriate location at a date and time mutually established between the researcher and the participant.

**Questions about the Research**

If you have questions about this study, please contact Reba Oguntokun at 616-331-1056 or by email at [fuggsre@gvsu.edu](mailto:fuggsre@gvsu.edu) or Dr. Mary Bair at 616-331-6697 or by email at [bairma@gvsu.edu](mailto:bairma@gvsu.edu) at any time. If you would like to speak with a counselor about any anxiety after the interview, contact the Counseling Center at 616-331-3266 or visit the Counseling Center located at 204 Student Services Building. For more information about your rights as a study participant, contact the Human Research Review Committee at 616-331-3197 or [hrrc@gvsu.edu](mailto:hrrc@gvsu.edu).

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the consent form above and would like to participate in this study of my own free will and desire.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to have my interview audiotaped.     Yes             No

***This research protocol has been approved by the Human Research Review Committee at Grand Valley State University. File No. 13-063-H Expiration: November 26, 2013.***

## Appendix F

### HRRC Approval

This research protocol has been approved by the Human Research Review Committee at Grand Valley State University. File No. 13-063-H Expiration: November 26, 2013.

# DATA FORM

## DATA FORM

### GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

#### ED 693/695 Data Form

NAME: Reba Loret Oguntokun

MAJOR: (Choose only1)

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adult & Higher Education                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Differentiation | <input type="checkbox"/> Library Media                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Content Specialization               | <input type="checkbox"/> Education Leadership        | <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Level Education           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cognitive Impairment                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Technology      | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading                          |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> College Student Affairs Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary Education        | <input type="checkbox"/> School Counseling                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood Education                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional Impairment        | <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary Level Education        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood Developmental Delay           | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Disabilities       | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Administration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TESOL   |  |   |

TITLE: The African American/Black Male Experience at Grand Valley State University: Implications for the Future

PAPER TYPE: (Choose only 1)

SEM/YR COMPLETED: Winter 2013

Project

Thesis

SUPERVISOR'S SIGNATURE OF APPROVAL

Mary Bair

Using key words or phrases, choose several ERIC descriptors (5 - 7 minimum) to describe the contents of your project. ERIC descriptors can be found online at:

1. Black males at PWI
2. Minority Status Stressors
3. Critical Race Theory
4. Black males at Grand Valley
5. Stereotype threat



