

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

## Making Space to Hear Black Men

I had some teachers, I think everybody has that one teacher that tells them that they're not going to make it. Mines was different. My teacher was a professor; I'm not going to say that she don't like Black folks because that's too extreme. She had a bad experience with a Black male in her class before and that sorta put a wall up . . . She was a White teacher, she told me "You know Jordan, many African Americans don't pass my class."

—Jordan<sup>1</sup>

I'm still trying to fit in; I'm still trying to figure out what's my niche at the school so that I'll be the best at who I am.

—Byron

It's been a little back and forth. Like I said, I met some great people networking wise; I made some good connections regarding career wise—switching my major. But with me being in my fraternity and the stereotypes that they have there's been a little bump with that. I've really been trying to get my grades up and get my fraternity back active on campus. People have the stereotypes of fraternities but our fraternity has the highest GPA on campus across all the fraternities and sororities. It just astonishes me how people can place a label on someone without knowing them. That's more of an insulting thing and a baffling thing. So, it's a little back and forth.

—Bannon

I thought I was going to be alone. I didn't think I was going to succeed; I just thought I was going to try [college] and see how it went. I didn't really expect to make it as far as I am now. I probably expected to live on campus all four years and I didn't expect to be part of any organizations or things like that.

—Donald

These are the words of Black<sup>2</sup> men about their time in college, from their concerns and expectations to their general and specific experiences on campus. The men were full-time college students who were involved in campus life and had experienced varying degrees of “success.” In many ways, they are statistics; the retention and completion rates of Black men have been tracked closely for the past two decades and their success (and “lack” of it) has been fodder for ongoing conversations, debates, and discussions (e.g., see Cuyjet, 2006; Garibaldi, 2007; Harper, 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2015).<sup>3</sup> Predictably, Black male success in higher education—like all students—is about statistics, primarily tracked by retention and graduation data with the latter given much more weight within public and institutional discourse. To be sure, the men in this study do share graduating from college as a common goal. Yet, in many ways, how they envision their college experiences and successes, navigate college from the time of their initial enrollment, and make sense of their time on campus are critical to better understanding what the data reveal—and hide. Jordan, a fourth-year political science major, expressed confusions about his college experiences. He was highly motivated to attend college but he was not accepted to the flagship university in his home state, which was his top choice while in high school. He had early difficulties in college because he wanted to go home; being in college was his first time away. He leaned on his spiritual beliefs in “trusting God” whenever he was faced with challenges. Jordan initially began school at a local community college, a decision he made so that he could be closer to his ailing aunt. He recounted his ability to balance the emotional and spiritual demands of his aunt's poor health with his college requirements as evidence of his potential. As he related his time on campus thus far, he focused on a particular in-class interaction with a White female professor that challenged his identity and academic ability. Without ever evaluating any of Jordan's work, or seeming to have the most basic insight into who

he is, the professor essentialized his racial identity and clearly expressed a denigrated expectation because of his social identities.

Byron, a third-year business major, has seen his progression through his college years. He, too, attended a community college prior to his current four-year university. His decision to attend community college was twofold. First, school was not stressed in his family and he shared that no one in his home communicated to him the importance of school or a higher education degree. Also, he felt that his high school did not prepare him for college, so he did not have a strong foundation or belief in college success. His experiences at the community college highlighted the academic areas that he needed to strengthen, exposed him to a variety of fields, and helped him mature as both a student and person. Even though he has made great strides, Byron stresses the importance of belonging on campus; he shared that he is still trying to find his place in college “so that I’ll be the best at who I am.” He believes that finding his place, or establishing a sense of belonging, is the key to his self-actualization.

Bannon, a third-year student, is an applied engineering major and is highly involved on campus. He is a member of the Omega Psi Phi fraternity and is engaged in several African-American student organizations on campus as well, such as the Black Student Union and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Bannon shared that he was a high school football player and chose his current university because he could continue his football participation; additionally, he cited family dynamics, costs, and proximity to home to be factors as well. He noted that his college experience has had both its high and low points. The people that he has met while in college along with the networking connections have contributed positively to his college career. The stereotyping and profiling he has experienced due to his fraternity affiliation, however, have dulled these positive experiences. Expressing surprise to the stereotyping of his fraternity, Bannon felt insulted that people would think lowly of his fraternal organization—even though they perform well academically. Thus, for Bannon, his sense of belonging has shifted based on the social spaces and contexts that he navigates, yielding both positive and negative outcomes.

Donald, a junior political science major and executive board member of his campus’s Black Male Initiative program, approached entering college with ambivalence; he thought he would give it a try and see what results he could muster. He expressed concern about being alone or

matter in college and chose his current institution primarily because it was located in the same city as his home. He held no expectations of being involved on campus prior to arriving and did not envision himself making it to his third year. Like many students, he was unsure of his major and also unsure of his future plans regarding employment and career. Although he performed well in high school, he felt unprepared for college and had not given significant consideration to the college experience—or succeeding in college.

### Confronting the Narrative

Much has been written about educating Black males across the K-20 pipeline. In fact, current research has noted once again that the underachievement of Black men in education is directly correlated with their lack of inclusion within American society. Over and over, we are promulgated with data and stories of Black male failures, the widening achievement gap, and what education scholar Pedro Noguera has identified as “the trouble with Black boys.”<sup>4</sup> En masse, Black men have been viewed in pathological ways within educational arenas and wider society. The stories told within public media often focus on their presumed deficiencies and the “trouble” that entraps their lives. Additionally, within educational contexts, Black males often are perceived and defined by those within the group who perform less well. The negative framing of Black males and constant focus on their punishment, expulsion, or engagement with the criminal justice system have led to a deficit rhetoric that predominates views and discussions of the entire group. These sweeping judgments and primary focus on retention and graduation data mean that in many instances the actual experiences of Black males in educational settings often are unheard. In specifically examining their experiences in higher education, data from previous research left two fundamental questions: Where are the Black men and why are so few on our college campuses? By extension, a related question permeates: Does higher education matter to Black men? Without a more nuanced exploration into their experiences and their own perceptions, the men cited above would seem to reflect the status quo of the seemingly disinterested, disengaged Black male that many education professionals and researchers have written off. Men such as Jordan, Byron, Bannon, and Donald, along with many of their peers, offer insights that complicate

the generalities often offered about Black male collegians and confront the deficit framing of Black men. These men often critically reflect on their experiences, social identities, and college careers. Unfortunately, their efforts and thoughts—and how they make sense of their educational experiences—have been overlooked and overshadowed too often in wider discussions.

Studies on Black male educational experiences have often posed them as the problem. Conceptions of their presumed deficiencies and opposition to learning and education have been used often to justify their achievement indices. For instance, Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu (1986) suggested that due to past discriminatory practices and limited educational resources, some Black students develop an “oppositional” culture to academic achievement. These types of theorizations led to focusing on the presumed values and norms adopted by the students within their schooling experience, giving primacy to their behaviors and actions while less attention was paid to their own conceptions, narratives, and understandings of their experiences and neglected to investigate institutional cultures and structures. A focus on Black male behaviors and expressions have allowed for discussions of their “difference” in educational settings and within the research arena as well. In institutional settings, this difference often has meant that efforts needed to be taken to get Black males to behave “correctly” or act “right” as well as demonstrating the values and norms outlined by mainstream society.<sup>5</sup> Said differently, the primal focus has resulted in a rhetoric of how Black males ought to act in schools and across campuses and has not given enough attention to how Black males see and experience how institutions act upon them. Even as efforts focused on Black male success have increased in the past two decades, much more attention has been given to why Black male collegians do not achieve as opposed to examining reasons why *they* believe they are and can be successful, how they experience college, and their achievement efforts.

A second arena of inquiry that is ripe for investigation is examining their experiences in student-centered programming, such as Black Male Initiative programs. In response to the data and reports on Black male (under)achievement, institutions have bolstered their programming efforts to include initiatives to strategically target the Black male population. Institutions such as Jackson College (Men of Merit), Parkland College (Brothers United Network), and Prairie State College (Protégé) are just a few examples of the institutional work related to addressing

earlier shortcomings at the community college level. Several colleges and universities have committed institutional space (via cultural or research centers), created initiatives, and established holistic programs to increase the retention and academic achievement of these students (for instance, Ohio State University created the Bell Resource Center and UCLA created the Black Male Institute). Additionally, student-led organizations have been created at multiple campuses including Arizona State University (African American Men of Arizona State University) and Rutgers University (Black Men's Collective); and collegiate chapters of 100 Black Men of America and the Student African American Brotherhood (200+ campuses) are national organizational models that focus on Black male success and peer support as well. Some stakeholders have created system-based models such as the University System of Georgia's African American Male Initiative (26 institutions) and the Arkansas African American Male Initiative (17 institutions) to name a few. Finally, some institutions have created conferences to convene stakeholders around the theme of Black male success such as the annual Black Male Summit hosted by the University of Akron. While these programs have been profiled and discussed—for instance, nine chapters of Michael Cuyjet's (2006) edited volume profile such programs—very few efforts have been reported on how Black males experience their time engaged in these programs. Thus, increasing Black male retention, graduation, and achievement requires that we examine their experiences in campus-based activities specifically designed to achieve these goals. Taken collectively, more work is needed that adds depth to the experiential realities of Black males on college campuses.<sup>6</sup>

This book explores how Black male college students manage and negotiate their college years, working to find their place on campus, experiencing the social milieu, engaging in Black male student-centered activities, and persisting toward graduation. The book addresses the following questions: How do Black men articulate and make meaning of their experiences in college? In terms of their identities, how do Black males experience their race and gender on campus? What strategies do they employ in order to persist toward graduation? And, finally, how does participating in a Black Male Initiative program matter in their college experience?

To understand their experiences and tease out the nuances of various campus spaces, I conducted in-depth interviews with 40 Black male students at two different institutions and complemented these interviews

with participant observation in some of their student-centered programs. Thirty-seven of the men in this study participated in the Black Male Initiative program on their campus. I spent some time attending meetings, attending events on and off campus, collaborating with program coordinators, and assisting the men in some of their programming efforts. The first institution, Lincoln State University, is a rural, medium-sized, historically White institution<sup>7</sup>; among the 10,000 students on campus, White students account for just over 70 percent of the population while Black students account for about 15 percent of the students. The school is located in Jefferson, which has a population of just over 20,000 residents and can be considered a college town. The median age in the city is 23 as compared to the state median of 42. Within the city, Whites account for 87 percent of the population while Blacks (7%), Hispanics (3%), and Asians (1.5%) account for the other major racial groups. Lincoln State is a master's level granting institution. The second institution, Monroe State University, is a large, public, research-focused institution, located in a metropolitan urban city. White students account for about 85 percent while Blacks account for 7 percent of the more than 20,000 students in the school's population. Monroe State is located in a city of over 600,000 people. The median age in the city is 37, which reflects the median of the state (38). Whites and Blacks account for the overwhelming majority of city residents; Whites make up 70 percent of the population while Blacks are just over 20 percent. Hispanics and Asians make up a small percentage of the city population as they account for 4 and 2 percent, respectively. Lincoln State and Monroe State report strong trends in student retention; over the past decade, Lincoln State has retained about 80 percent of its students annually while Monroe State's retention is similar at about 77 percent. Additionally, Lincoln State has graduated about 60 percent of its students steadily over a 6-year period and Monroe State, in response to targeted efforts, has steadily increased its graduation rate, which now stands near 55 percent.

As both institutions revere their (increasing) racial and ethnic diversity on campus, celebrated through student programming and various cultural events, they also have made strategic plans to improve the experiences of their diverse populations. More specifically, the Black male student population is a group that both institutions have targeted for increased retention and graduation rates. In an effort to achieve these goals, both of the institutions have an active Black Male Initiative (BMI) program on campus. Lincoln State University's program, Mighty

Men Mentoring, is organized through the Student Affairs office. The program is not a registered student organization, which means that they do not receive funding through student government. Three staff members, all Black males during the years that I observed, coordinated the weekly meetings while Mighty Men members initiated and developed the majority of the program's events and activities. In the fall, Mighty Men hosts a welcome event for Black male students and during the spring the men are engaged in a program retreat that focuses on the men's health and well-being. They also conduct programing for Black History Month as well and collaborate with other organizations on campus when possible.

According to Monroe State University's recently developed Diversity Plan, several initiatives are included to focus on particular student groups, one of which is Black males. The Brothers & Scholars program, established within the past few years and coordinated by one Black male staff member, is charged with researching and implementing strategies to improve the retention and graduation of undergraduate Black males. In attempting to achieve its goals, Brothers & Scholars sponsors activities and events that directly address the needs of their Black male student population. Students are engaged in monthly meetings, social outings, community service, academic study tables, and various other activities as well. Both Mighty Men and Brothers & Scholars are academic and social cohesion programs that focus on peer group development while serving to help students transition to the university and support them throughout their collegiate careers. These efforts, both individually and collectively, are aimed at building a microcommunity for Black male students that provides an academic, social, and personal support network. I report my findings in the context of both campuses.

Most of *Being Black, Being Male on Campus* focuses on how the men narrate and make meaning from their college experiences. Although the campuses are distinct in their location and size, students from both universities characterize much of their on-campus experiences with race and gender similarly. The stories shared in this book examine their academic aspirations and early college experiences, the strategies they have employed to persevere academically and socially, and the beneficence they assign to engaging in a Black Male Initiative program.

Examining Black male collegiate experiences opens a broad canvas to investigate the intersections of race and gender and how they matter in higher education. The study attends to compounding and intersecting discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991; Feagin, 1992), racial microaggressions



(Harper, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007), and racial battle fatigue (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011) as prevalent issues that the men face on campus.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the book also offers insight into how many of these Black male collegians have navigated college successfully to press forward toward graduation. While improving retention for Black males is a key issue for all educational stakeholders, what can we learn from Black males who continuously enroll in courses each semester, who earn enough credits to matriculate toward graduation, who continue to beat the odds, and sometimes surpass their own expectations? In *Being Black, Being Male on Campus*, I examine how Black men perceive, experience, and navigate the academic and social arenas on campus and how they engage resilience, social and cultural capital, and craft coping strategies to persevere in college. Additionally, a key collegiate experience articulated by the vast majority of the men was to fulfill their sense of belonging on campus. In order to better understand this, I probe their participation in their campus's Black Male Initiative Program. Given the need for engaging Black male students both academically and socially (Barker & Avery, 2012; Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008a; Zell, 2011), helping students define and redefine their self-concepts (Harper, 2014; Dancy, 2012), and creating community in college (Brooms, 2016a; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012), investigating their experiences in BMI-type programs could offer important insight into ways to increase engagement, persistence, and degree completion for this student population. These stories and experiences of Black college men are important because they provide counter-narratives to Black male mediocrity and academic disengagement and/or disinterest (see Harper, 2009; Warde, 2008). Additionally, as a range of researchers attest, there is a critical need to address and increase Black men's access, retention, and persistence in higher education (Palmer et al., 2014; Williams, 2013; Wood & Palmer, 2015).

The main title of the book, *Being Black, Being Male on Campus*, speaks to four findings of the study. First, as college students on campus the place that Black males seek reflects how these students engage in a continuous search for belonging throughout their educational experiences. Many of the students reveal that their experiences have abounded in paradoxes; on the one hand, many students share that they did not feel prepared for college based on their secondary school experiences, yet many of these men still maintained high educational aspirations. Thus, how they fit and how their aspirations align with their place are not

always harmonious. The men also discuss how they experience campus and the ways that they are perceived. These viewpoints and understandings matter in how the men make sense of their experiences. Additionally, they express high motivations to succeed academically with many preparing to attend graduate schools, they continue to build meaningful relationships among faculty, staff, and peers, and they desire to achieve regardless of their circumstances. The Black Male Initiative programs not only offer the students a unique space to counterbalance some of the hostility and discrimination they face on campus but it also offers them access to a support group where they are engaged personally, academically, socially, and professionally. Their hopes, aspirations, engagements, and successes seem to run against the current from the narratives that are shared often regarding Black men and education. *Being Black, Being Male on Campus* thus attends to how Black male collegians move from a status of limbo and highlights the strategies they developed and employed to persevere. Finally, the voices of the men in this study are viewed as a counter-narrative that aims to disrupt simplified variations of Black male underachievement and gives voice to how their racialized and gendered identities impact their collegiate experiences.

### Talking *with* Black Men to Hear Their Voices and Experiences

One of the hallmarks of this study is centered on talking *with* Black men about their schooling and college-related experiences. In listening to Black men share their stories, experiences, and perspectives, we have a unique opportunity to *hear them through their own words*. All too often, the narratives and rhetoric about Black men do two things that require our immediate attention. First, the dominant discourse leaves them out of the conversation as contributors about their own experiences. For instance, sociologist Alford Young (2004, p. 209) asserted that the common practice of *talking at* Black men leads “to a societal misrecognition of who these people are, and what their capacities might be.” In educational research, two studies are noteworthy. Education scholars have made similar points as well. For instance, in his research on 32 high-achieving Black male students, Shaun Harper (2009) commented that many of the students shared that it was the first time that anyone had discussed their academic experiences with them. Similarly, Tyrone Howard (2008), in his study of 55 Black male secondary school students, also noted that the students offered that they had not been engaged

in serious conversations about their schooling experiences. A number of men in the current study echoed these sentiments by asserting that outside of a small number of people, who they developed relationships with through student affairs and engagement on campus, there were very few instances where people engaged them in conversations about their educational experiences. Second, the dominant discourse continues to marginalize Black men to the extent that it is pervasive and institutionalized. Education scholar Michael Cuyjet (1997) argued that one of the first things in need of addressing is to recognize “the broad acceptance and institutionalization of these negative perceptions of black men as threatening, unfriendly, and less intelligent than any other distinguishable segment of the American population” (p. 8). Almost as a direct response, Harper (2009) asserted the need for counter-narratives that problematize the ways that this student population is “niggered” by deficit rhetoric. Similarly, the title and use of counter-stories in Howard’s (2008) study is just as scathing as he examines the experiences of Black male students and poignantly asks, “Who really cares?”

Thus, the need for Black men to tell their own stories, and reflect on their own experiences, is critical for all educational stakeholders including the Black male students themselves. Education scholar James Earl Davis (1999) contended that the voices of Black males on college campuses often are not heard, misunderstood, or simply ignored. Without talking *with* Black males, there is no way to appreciate their situated standpoints and understandings and, in effect, we continue to silence and diminish the cultural wealth and cultural knowledge that they bring with them. As we endeavor to build community on campus—and other education-based spaces—it is imperative that we no longer relegate Black men to the sidelines. Black men have a wealth of gifts and talents to offer us, which ultimately will benefit us all. Their ways of knowing and their ways of being can be explicated only by inviting them into conversations, discussions, and decisions. In addition, we must intentionally provide space to hear what they want to share along with some of the things that we need to hear. Providing space for both helps to build community. Additionally, as Black men are given more space to share their experiences, we create space for critical self-reflection and opportunities to tap into their cultural wealth and knowledge. As a result, our communities (and new communities) can be enhanced through their voices, experiences, and sharing.

I echo the sentiments of Black feminist scholar Audre Lorde, and amplify her rejoinder in the case of Black men, in acknowledging that

if we do not allow Black men to define themselves for themselves then they will [continue to] be crushed by other people's fantasies as their images, abilities, possibilities, and bodies are eaten alive.<sup>9</sup> Thus, our educational, scholarly, and practice efforts must be humanizing for all students and especially for Black males. I join a throng of educators, researchers, and practitioners who call for (re)enhancing, (re)imagining, and (re)engaging Black males in education. These points also align with the sentiments expressed by Baldrige, Hill, and Davis (2011, p. 133), as they noted:

Through their stories, we are better able to understand the complex social, cultural, and economic forces that obstruct their pathways to educational success. Such insights not only serve as powerful rejoinders to the current post-racial discourse, but also prompt us to locate innovative solutions to the current educational crisis of Black males.<sup>10</sup>

Without doubt, the stories of Black men are powerful tools to help us see through different lenses, hear with heightened sensibilities, and, hopefully, (re)commit us to effecting change for their betterment. Centering their voices is at the heart of the analysis presented in this book.

## Understanding Black Male College Experiences

Three theoretical concepts are central to understanding how Black male students think about their identities and college experiences: Critical Race Theory, Blackmaleness, and sense of belonging. Each of these concepts helps to understand and confront being Black and male on campus.

### Critical Race Theory

Dating back to the groundbreaking work of preeminent scholar and Black sociologist W. E. B. DuBois (1903/2005), who sought to uplift the voices and experiences of Blacks in the United States, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is useful to undergird and theoretically frame research on Communities of Color. In his critically important works, critical race theorist Derrick Bell (1987, 1992, 1996, 2004) theorized the role of

race and racism in the U.S. society. Bell argued that racism is a permanent, indestructible component within society and for those who “bear the burdens of racial subordination, any truth—no matter how dire—is uplifting.”<sup>11</sup> According to Richard Delgado, CRT evolved out of legal studies during the 1980s as a movement that sought to account for the persistent role of race and racism in the United States. Initially, CRT scholars critiqued the ongoing societal racism in Black and White binary terms.<sup>12</sup> Bell, along with other Critical Race Scholars, advanced the framework to examine a full realm of communities to include Black Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, Chicanas/os, and Latinas/os and their experiences with racism and various forms of oppression along with their responses and resistances (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009, p. 662).

Although originally used in legal studies, CRT extends from and draws on a broad literature base in law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women’s studies. Scholars extended the tenets of CRT to investigate race and racism in education (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Harper, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000). Solórzano and colleagues (2000) were some of the early scholars to use CRT to analyze campus racial climate. Situating their work along other scholars, they contended that CRT was critical in offering “insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogies that guide our efforts to identify, analyze and transform the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (p. 63). In general, scholars also identified five elements shared by CRT scholarship that can be useful in educational research. These elements have been used by a number of scholars in the past two decades to unravel the racialized experiences of Blacks, Chicanas/os, Latinas/os, and other Students of Color at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. The tenets of critical race theory are: (1) the centrality of race and racism; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology (and the status quo); (3) a commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) an interdisciplinary perspective.<sup>13</sup> Solórzano and colleagues (2000) distinguish the CRT framework for education from other CRT frameworks by noting its simultaneous foregrounding of race and racism in the research as well as challenging the traditional separation of race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact on communities of color. Additionally, CRT offers a liberating and transformative method for examining racial,

gender, and class discrimination by clearly articulating how Communities of Color are racialized, gendered, and classed. The knowledge and methodology are both multidisciplinary, spanning from legal studies and history to women's studies, sociology, and ethnic studies, which creates a platform for better understanding the various forms of discrimination and oppression. According to critical race scholars, these tenets present a "unique approach to existing modes of scholarship in higher education because they explicitly focus on how the social construct of race shapes university structures, practices, and discourses from the perspectives of those injured by and fighting against institutional racism."<sup>14</sup>

Most importantly, as mentioned above, CRT intentionally provides space for those who are marginalized, oppressed, and problematized to have their voices heard through counter-stories and counter-narratives (Aguirre, 2010; Delgado, 1989; Harper, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) identify counter-narratives as a critical tool for stories from people who are often marginalized in literature (and wider society) and as a means to examine, critique, and counter master narratives composed about People of Color. Master narratives are dominant accounts that often are generally accepted as universal truths about particular groups (i.e., Black males don't care about education)—these scripts, while readily available and easily consumable, caricature these groups in negative ways. Similarly, Aguirre (2010) also asserts the importance of counter-narratives to give voice to People of Color. The lived experiences of People of Color challenge the dominant social reality, revealing their agency and the importance of self-reflexivity. CRT is critical to expose how People of Color are minoritized by silences and distorts their experiences through deficit rhetoric and deficit-informed reports and research. CRT was used as a conceptual lens for understanding the experiences of the men in the current study and helped to refine the initial study questions to incorporate race, gender, resilience, and narratives as useful methods of inquiry. As scholars suggest, these counter-stories and counter-narratives are vital to knowing more about the psychological resistance, sociopolitical strategies, and creative ingenuity employed by those who "consciously decide to defy racist stereotypes, exceed expectations, and offer more affirming views of their individual selves and the Black male collective" (Harper, 2009, p. 669).

Within the current study, being resilient in college is not simply about persisting toward graduation for many of the men, it is also about resisting the deficit rhetoric, negative framing, and stereotypes and hos-

tilities aimed at their entire racialized and gendered group. Thus, CRT empowers Black men, and other members of marginalized communities, by allowing space where they, along with their stories and experiences, matter. Additionally, these groups have opportunities to hear the stories of others and learn how to improve their efforts to cope, resist, build coalitions, and persevere. As sociologist Patricia Hill Collins acknowledges the power and empowering nature of new knowledge about one's own experience, she further contends that, "revealing new ways of knowing that allow subordinate groups to define their own reality has far greater implications."<sup>15</sup> Throughout this book, I use the main tenets of CRT outlined above to explore the narratives of Black men to better understand and appreciate how they experience their race and gender on campus, the strategies they employ to persist, and their participation in BMI programs. Even more importantly, the book is aimed at allowing the men to define and make meaning from their own experiences on campus.

### Blackmaleness: Double Consciousness, Invisibility, and Black Misandry

As a connection and compliment to CRT, examining how Black men experience the intersections of their race and gender require an interdisciplinary perspective. This perspective is particularly useful to study Black males in U.S. society broadly, and in college more specifically, as their experiences on college campuses and public spaces help to tease out and reveal several competing narratives of race and gender. As mentioned previously, Black men continue to be identified as "troubled" which has social, personal, and academic consequences. I situate the convergences of Black male identity within Athna Mutua's (2006) Blackmaleness framework to highlight some of the forces in operation against Black men and to which Black men carve out identities and coping strategies. In the current study, Blackmaleness is used to highlight and investigate the combined impact of Black men's racialized and gendered identities. In theorizing Black masculinities, Mutua argued that Black men routinely faced suspicion, which narrowed their life opportunities as they are "oppressed because they are both Black and men; that is, Black men are oppressed by gendered racism" (p. 6). As the participants in the current study attested, being Black and male on campus leaves them open to an array of challenges and their activities, location, and forms of expression are insignificant in how they often are imagined and projected. Thus, in some ways, they were relegated among the "faces at the bottom of

the well” (see Bell, 1992). Their Blackmaleness leaves them subject to prejudices, assumptions, and predispositions of the White gaze—a gaze that constantly surveils their movements and automatically (re)positions them as persons whose presence must be scrutinized.

James and Lewis (2014) defined Blackmaleness as the “individually unique, yet collective development needs and processes experienced by Black male learners within the American inopportunity-opportunity structures.”<sup>16</sup> They identified Blackmaleness as both a personal journey and a social reality that ultimately impacted the life chances of Black males across ideological, institutional, and individual inopportunity. Additionally, Blackmaleness also is important in unraveling and understanding Black men’s masculine identities and manhood constructs. Ideal (hegemonic) masculinity embodies socially valued traits that typically include strength, aggression, dominance, competition, and control. Manhood is informed by intersecting social identities (i.e., race, gender, class, etc.) and is a multilayered concept referring to the self-expectations, relationships and responsibilities to family and other significant relationships, and worldviews that men accept or acknowledge.<sup>17</sup> As Davis (1999) argued, gender is a significant factor in Black males’ social and academic experiences in college. In this study, I investigate the effects of social support on the men’s sense of self and the coping strategies they deploy in navigating the campus climate and environment. In particular, I explore the social support they receive from other Black male collegians and through their engagement in an institutionalized Black male program. Academic achievement is related to student satisfaction with general college life. Students’ pre-college preparation, support, identity, academic efforts, and engagement on campus all matter in how they experience college. Thus, grounding Black men’s experiences within Blackmaleness also allows space to better see their situated standpoints and how their race and gender matter in how they belong (and try to belong) on campus.

#### BLACK MEN VEILED: A DUBOISIAN FRAME

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter around it . . . How does it feel to be a problem? DuBois (1903/2005, p. 1)



In opening his classic literary work *The Souls of Black Folk*, esteemed sociologist W. E. B. DuBois (2005) deemed that there existed two different and distinct worlds within the United States: one Black, to which he belonged, and one White, “the other world.” The main chasm between these two worlds was their inability to relate to each other; yet, as DuBois relates, the presence and existence of the Black world was a problem. In pondering the meaning of Blackness at the dawn of the century, he offered that being a problem is “a strange experience.” DuBois theorizes that Blacks are “born with a veil” and live in a world that denies Black self-consciousness; he writes of the internal struggle of being both an American and a Negro, which he posits as two souls with two unreconciled strivings. Thus, the Black existence in the United States is a history of the strivings for consciousness and wholeness. DuBois’ veil gives Blacks a “second sight” to see the world from a particular standpoint and through a particular lens—much different from whites; however, segregation rendered the Black world invisible.

I argue that DuBois’s double consciousness and veil concepts also extend to the experiences of Black males at historically White institutions.<sup>18</sup> As significant social institutions within the United States, colleges and universities play a key role in introducing students to different cultures (or further extending their experiences) and orienting them to the larger social structures. Many of the men in this study reveal how being Black and male in college is “a strange experience,” which often pulls at both their raced and gendered identities and entraps them in a constant battle. On historically White campuses, Black male students, like other Students of Color, are a numerical minority and must learn to navigate the majority culture of their institution—this includes social and academic campus spaces, students, faculty and staff, and even the surrounding community. At the same time, Black male students also must think about managing their responses to being problematized and attaining their college degree. Thus, they are engaged in various pressures, struggles, and battles to negotiate self against being otherized.

#### BLACK MALE INVISIBILITY

Critical writers such as Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, in addition to researchers, provide important insights for understanding Black male positionality and the perceptual lenses levied against them. Ellison’s (1952/1995) work suggests that Black men face a unique struggle for vis-

ibility in U.S. society. He articulates various contradictions and complexities that invisibility renders on Black men; on the one hand, many people remain aloof of/to his presence while, on the other hand, they treat him within an inferior frame (as if he lacks humanity) when they do “see” him. This imposed invisibility of Ellison’s unnamed protagonist extends DuBois’s veil concept. Similarly, Baldwin (1961) uses a “fly in buttermilk” analysis to unpack Black male invisibility in both social and institutional predominantly White spaces. Almost as a response to DuBois’s burgeoning question, Baldwin exposes the complicity of racial reasoning and demonstrates that the “Negro problem” is, in fact, a White problem.

When they are “visible” in various social and public spaces, Black males are relegated to what sociologist Elijah Anderson terms a “master status”—a stigmatizing effect of “negative” status-determining characteristics that applies to them as a group.<sup>19</sup> The trappings of master status and stereotyping render their individual identities and personas invisible. Ellison’s (1995) theory suggests that African-American men have to cope with the simultaneity of being both present and unseen, which ultimately impacts the ways that they are able to engage in various settings. Anderson’s (1990, 2004, 2011) application of “master status” offers added understanding about the ways in which Black males experience interracial interactions in public spaces and exposes the realities of race and racism in the United States.

Franklin and Boyd-Franklin (2000) conceptualized the “invisibility syndrome” to identify the struggles that individuals endure with inner feelings and beliefs that personal talents, abilities, and character are not acknowledged or valued by others, nor by the larger society, because of racial prejudice.<sup>20</sup> Several researchers have applied Ellison’s invisibility concept to the experiences of Black students in historically and predominantly white institutions (and institutional spaces). Davis and colleagues (2004) found invisibility and hypervisibility as key experiences in students being noticed or not being noticed in school wholly as a result of being Black. Students identified experiencing discomfort and loneliness and being deliberately ignored in their feelings of invisibility. However, many also described being hypervisible in feeling out of place on campus. Similarly, in Harper et al.’s (2011) study, students felt that all eyes were often on them primarily because they stood out racially from the majority. Thus, investigating *how* Black male students feel, experience, and make sense of their experiences in college provides opportunities to better understand their sense of belonging on campus.

## BLACK MISANDRY AND RACIAL BATTLE FATIGUE

Given the ways that Black men are racialized, simultaneously invisible and hypervisible, and problematized in U.S. society, researchers have conceptualized racial battle fatigue (or Black male misandry) to identify the racial microaggressions, hostilities, and discrimination that problematize Black men (Smith, 2004, 2010; Smith et al., 2007; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). For instance, Smith and colleagues (2007) assert that the intersecting identities of Black men are a double burden due to race (i.e., anti-Black racism) and gender (i.e., Black misandry or anti-Black male attitudes and oppression). They surmise that the ongoing and persistent exposure to race-related stressors at the societal, institutional, interpersonal, and individual levels and the interpretations and coping responses employed by Blacks can lead to the traumatic and physiological stress conditions of racial battle fatigue. Furthermore, the authors note that Black males not only face racial microaggressions (in the form of mini-assaults) but they also experience racial macroaggression—large scale, systems-related stressors that are widespread, that sometimes are highly publicized, race-related, traumatic events.

Thus, considering Black male experiences within Blackmaleness is quite helpful for the current study. In particular, Blackmaleness helps to better appreciate the concomitant pushes and pulls that Black males experience within wider society in general and how various components of being Black and men often are enacted on them during their college years. Many of the men describe their overall college experiences in positive terms; they point directly to their peer relationships, engagement on campus, and various activities and opportunities they have pursued to support their assertions. However, the point of Blackmaleness is to identify more clearly the intertwining of race and gender and the ways that Black men are problematized and always already the subject (and object) of surveillance and scrutiny.<sup>21</sup> As the men specifically discuss the campus racial climate, race relations, and what it means to be a Black male on campus, they narrate and reaffirm these challenges. Thus, Blackmaleness accentuates the micro- and macroaggressions as a constant presence that can and do act upon the men and reveals how the men attempt to negotiate their identities on campus.

The Black men in this study are not passive in how they experience being racialized and gendered. In formulating their academic aspirations and experiencing college, their persistence requires awareness,

interpretations, and coping responses to the college milieu. Examining how their social identities matter in their college experience, and asking the men to make meaning of these experiences, allows space for them to narrate how they cope on campus. Above their individual efforts though, better understanding their aspirations and experiences highlights the critical need for educational professionals and policymakers to confront these challenges at the institutional and policy levels.

### Student Integration and Sense of Belonging

Previous research has highlighted the significant, positive correlation of belonging and integration to retention and persistence (Astin, 1993, 1999). Astin (1999) identified five basic assumptions about involvement. First, he asserted that involvement requires an investment of psychosocial and physical energy toward various objects. Second, involvement occurs along a continuum where the amount of energy invested varies from student to student. Third, involvement has qualitative and quantitative features. Fourth, the quality and quantity of student involvement impacts the amount of student learning and personal development gained. Lastly, academic performance is correlated with the student involvement. This theory provides fertile ground for higher education research and identifies the crucial nature of involvement on student outcomes. Astin (1999) also identified various forms of involvement (such as academic involvement and student-faculty interaction) and noted several areas for further exploration (i.e., the role of peer groups and attribution and locus of control).

In addition to involvement, Tinto's (1997, 1998) model of student persistence provides a useful framework to examine the experiences of Black college men. Tinto identified institutional experiences, involving the educational system, and academic and social integration as central to the college experience. In acknowledging the many pathways to involvement, Tinto (1998) asserted that involvement could take place inside and/or outside the classroom. Students who feel a sense of belonging, who take part in extracurricular activities, and who feel connected with fellow students and teachers, are more inclined to persist in their studies. Without social integration, persistence becomes more difficult, which ultimately affects a student's ability to graduate.

Education scholar Terrell L. Strayhorn (2012) conceptualized a sense of belonging framework that was based in student persistence and student involvement theories along with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of