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SPIRITUALITY AS A VIABLE RESOURCE IN  
RESPONDING TO RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS:  
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF BLACK MALES  
WHO ATTENDED A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A Dissertation Presented

by

LLOYD SHELDON JOHNSON

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies  
University of Massachusetts Boston  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

June 2012

College of Education and Human Development  
Higher Education Administration Program

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## ABSTRACT

### SPIRITUALITY AS A VIABLE RESOURCE IN RESPONDING TO RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF BLACK MALES WHO ATTENDED A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

June 2012

Lloyd Sheldon Johnson, B.A., Wayne State University  
M.Ed., Antioch University  
Ed.D., University of Massachusetts Boston

Directed by Commonwealth Professor Judith I. Gill

Upon entering college, Black males must negotiate a system that assumes they are in need of academic remediation and are lacking in higher-order critical thinking skills (Washington, 1996; Brown II, 2002; Harper, 2012). The low enrollment levels of Black males in college and their disenchantment with their college experiences has increased the likelihood that they will not be in classrooms with a diverse student population and a climate where they could feel comfortable (NSSE, 2008; Harper, 2006A; Harper, 2012). Black males who have enrolled in college must shoulder the stresses that accompany perceptions and stereotypes on campus about who they are (Washington, 1996) and can expect to encounter racial microaggressions: the verbal, nonverbal, or visual insults directed at people of color (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2002).

I proposed that spirituality may provide Black males with the tools they need to succeed in college and mitigate the effects of racial microaggressions. The study explored the experiences of fifteen Black males who attended a community college to determine whether their spirituality impacted their responses to racial microaggressions. Definitions of spirituality were examined to find an appropriate construct for use in this research. The conceptual frameworks that guided this research focused on racial microaggressions (Sue, 2011), spirituality (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Delgado, 2005; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Chatters, 1994), and Critical Race Theory (Solorzano, 2007; Collins, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The findings indicated that spirituality may have provided Black males who attended a community college with compassion, forgiveness, inner strength, and empathy when encountering racial microaggressions.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to the three wonderful women who are at the core of my being. Sadly, they are no longer with me in flesh. They crossed over years ago, but there is not a day that passes that I don't think of them: my mother, M. Imogene Johnson; my sister, Alexia Patricia Johnson Lee; my grandmother, Mary Morrell. Their unconditional love for me - the guidance, the indulgence, the support - was the foundation of security I needed during my developing years. I lost all three within a five-year period and still I grieve.

As they departed, however, their messengers sent Hazel Bynum Allen and Swayzine Asher, mother figures who loved me as their birth son, opening their arms and homes to welcome me whenever I went to Detroit for a visit. They, too, have now crossed, but not without having their messengers send a Mother of God, my Godmother, Ester Truitt!

I am her "baby boy" and she is my "G-Mom." We are connected through spirit and there are few days that pass when we don't speak and share. She is the spiritual embodiment of all the great women who gave me what I needed to be the person I am today. When I look into her eyes, I see my mother and my sister and I am enveloped in true love and joy-filled peace.

I also dedicate this dissertation to the millions of young Black men in America who, like myself, must battle the evils of racism and injustice. I have dedicated my life and career to empowering them and others marginalized by class, sexual preference, gender, or lifestyle. We don't need any more executions of Black men. No more D J Henrys, Trayvon Martins, or terrorists gunning down Black people as they did recently in

Tulsa, Oklahoma. An educated and spirited citizenry can change the world. We must live from our hearts and love from our hearts. I pray for open minds and kind souls to guide us to the harmony and peace we all deserve.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The inspiration for this dissertation dates back to many years ago when I, at around age eight, sought answers for the many existential questions that puzzled me. Searching for answers in my interactions with people gave fuel to my life quest and took me on a spiritual journey that I am still traveling. I followed the tenets of Christianity, the teachings of Islam, the logic of Buddhism, the humanism of the Quakers, the wisdom of the Orishas, and the freedom that came with discovering the love that unifies all people. I have learned many lessons from many people and many experiences, and the process of researching and writing this dissertation has changed who I am. It was no surprise to those who know me that I would choose to conduct research on spirituality. As a Spiritualist and a humanist, I am always probing the ways of people and how they make sense of their worlds and the challenges they confront. I am a long way from the Detroit that “raised” me, distanced from my many journeys around the world that “educated” me, but always close to those I meet, ever mindful of the spirit within each of us that unites me with all of us.

Though there were many bumps on this journey, there were many angels who dotted my path. I am deeply grateful to have had Dr Judith I. Gill as my committee chairperson. She guided me through this process with an unyielding commitment and a focus on scholarship and protocol that kept me marching forward, rather than taking detours. She is a gifted educator and a strong and powerful leader. I am eternally grateful to the Spirits for blessing me with Dr. Susan M. Dole. She is friend, colleague, confidante, mediator, counselor, angel of optimism, messenger of hope! I could not have done this without her, and that’s a fact! My committee members, Dr. Dwight Giles, Jr.

and Dr. Jerome W. Wright, provided insight and support that made this research richer and solid. I was blessed to have them share their many years of wisdom and expertise. Dr. Wright's background in anthropology, social work, and minority education brought a focus to this work that was needed. Of course, the fifteen study participants, the Black males who attended a community college who volunteered for this research, were the backbone of this study. Their candor and trust in me brought a richness to the interviews and revelations about the challenges they have to mount. They will inspire others to probe deeper into the themes and topics that emerged. The Leadership in Higher Education Program at the University of Massachusetts Boston is staffed with a group of caring scholar-professionals who have shepherded me through a powerful experience that I will always honor and cherish. Dr. Jay Dee has been at the helm, and he has mentored me in ways he will never know. The professors who taught and guided me along the way have a special place in my spirit home. Ms. Molly Pedriali, administrative assistant extraordinaire, radiates calm. I am certain she could quiet any roaring sea! Dr. Sherry Penney, Dr. Vicki Milledge, Dr. Linda Eisenmann, and the late Dr. Harold Horton stand out as strong advocates who respected me and encouraged me.

Cohort 2000 sounds like the name of a fast new automobile being developed at a Ford Motor Company plant in Michigan, but it is the name assigned to the group of us who started this journey some years back. We were a fast-paced, super-turbo group, for sure! I grew as a result of having met each person in that special group. We shared our lives, our passions, and our pains. I have developed lifelong friendships as a result of having shared a challenging academic process with them. Chuck Phair is like a brother to me; Susan Dole is, of course, my Angel. Pat, Mary Lou, Tony, Dan, John, Claudia, and

Joanne are all locked into special memories. I will always toast and applaud Susan and Mary Lou for being with me during those final hours when the clock was ticking and time was running out.

Though I always feel supported, protected and guided by the Ancestors, Spirit Guides, Angels, Orishas, and Saints who form my spiritual cosmology, I could not have completed this work without my special friends and colleagues. Their belief in me sparked and inspired the tenacity I needed to complete this dissertation. Darren Mack, little brother-son-friend-confidante-ally, embodies all the qualities one could hope for in a real friend. He speaks his truth, lives his truth, and brings truth and loyalty to our solid and powerful friendship. He has walked many a mile with me, and I am truly blessed to have him in my life: he is family! My lovely and wonderful spirit sister, Dr. Sandra Truitt Robinson, president of the Eastern Campus of Wayne County Community College in Detroit, is an outstanding educator who has been my inspiration and role model for most of my adult life. She has been honored for her intellect and leadership; she amazes me with her boundless energy! Claude Elliott always checked in. He was my barometer and conscience. Professor Larry Watson gave me the gift of Dr. Loretta Williams, friend and editor, who knows how to keep you on task and on time! Her wisdom helped me to find the clarity and grounding I needed. My spirit family was always there to help me with any task I needed to have taken care of, and they never complained. I love them for who they are and for what they have made me. Ms. Belynda Bady, Ms. Samantha Webb, Professor Monica Johnson, and Professor Lee Santos Silva always asked me what I needed done next. They never sighed, complained, or refused to help. My colleagues at Bunker Hill Community College, too numerous to name here, gave me encouragement

and offered sympathetic ears and open arms, and many times chocolate, when the stresses and deadlines had me leaving the college many, many mornings as the sun was rising. The extra minds and extra eyes that were able to see and think about things in unique ways gave this research some added sparkle. Lori Catalozzi, Lee Santos Silva, Lars Klint, Rob Whitman, Charles Grandson, and Larry Watson are committed and brilliant educators who have touched the lives of thousands and will continue to do so. Their love of learning and commitment to social justice will impact education in new and exciting ways. I wish we had hundreds more like them. Dr. Terrence Gomes, president of Roxbury Community College, has been a friend and colleague for many years. I can't thank him enough for being there when I needed a haven of support! Finally, I must applaud Laura, one of the best editors I have met. Her comforting words and technical skills turned many a crisis into a minor concern.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### Overview of the Study

Community colleges have been touted in both academic literature and in the general media as having the most diverse student populations in U.S. higher education. Much has been inferred from studies conducted on four-year college and university institutions and populations. There have been fewer scholarly studies on community colleges, particularly ones where the actual voices presented are those persons who are filling the community college campuses with “color:” the students of color.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), the 1,045 community colleges in America in that year enrolled a diverse student population with large percentages of nontraditional and low-income students. Because tuition and fees at community colleges were lower than those at traditional four-year institutions, they attracted a broad range of students, many of whom were first-time, first generation college students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

While recognizing the richness of exploring the diverse ethnicities represented within the community college student populations, I chose to focus on one particular group: males of African descent. This population in itself is diverse, and it was a challenge to decide whether and how to represent that diversity as I analyzed the data on Black males and spirituality/religiosity. Within the United States, males of African

descent may be from any part of the enormous continent of Africa or any part of the Diaspora. They may be African American, born in the United States. They may be Brazilian, Cape Verdean, Puerto Rican, Haitian, Jamaican, or Cuban. Using subjects with parents from different geographical locations posed concerns and interesting dynamics for analysis. The issues of culture and ethnicity emerged, and the challenge of “race” definition in America has thus been reduced, for this research, to skin color. For the purposes of this research, the focus is on Black males in general.<sup>1</sup> The disaggregation of this group has not been undertaken in this study. This exploratory study has implications for further research in this area.

Upon entering college, Black males must negotiate a system that often assumes they are in need of academic remediation, are in college because they are enrolled in an athletic program, or are lacking higher-order critical thinking skills (Washington, 1996; Brown II, 2002; Harper, 2012). Misconceptions lead some on campus to see all Black males as a monolithic racial group (Cuyjet, 2006; Palmer & Wood, 2012). Guided by stereotypes gleaned from both print and electronic media, some people respond to Black males with apprehension and fear. Preston suggested (2001) that “most men of color in America have a tenuous claim to full citizenship,” because they are perceived as threats and are constructed to have very low expectations of themselves (p. 160). These assumptions and perspectives, which are frequently projected in negative media images, may explain in part why many Black males detach from college activities and may not fully participate in the college experience.

---

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this study, the term “Black” refers to all peoples of African heritage-descent. “African American” refers to those persons of African heritage who were born in the United States. Citations that use the terms “Negro,” “Black,” or “African American” will not be changed. So, too, citations using the term “White” will remain as written originally.

Some Black males may not take advantage of the social and extracurricular activities offered at the colleges and universities they attend because of issues related to others' perceptions about who they are. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) uses data, collected annually, from four-year institutions to identify effective programs and activities that foster personal development and learning for students. The survey concluded that of all the students who responded, Black students, male and female, were the least satisfied with their college experience. Further, the low enrollments of Black males in college, especially those at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), increased the likelihood that they would not be in classrooms with a diverse student population and a climate where they could feel comfortable (NSSE, 2008; Harper, 2006a; Harper, 2012).<sup>2</sup> The discomfort Black males felt in their college classrooms may have been connected to stereotypes based on the myth of Black inferiority that were projected onto them.

This exploratory study gave voice to this particular subset of college students: Black males who have attended a community college. Through their own words, I wished to learn more about how these men responded to racial microaggressions, and, most importantly, what resources they drew upon to negotiate successfully past the situations. By microaggressions I refer to “the constant and continuing everyday reality of slights, insults, invalidations, and indignities visited upon marginalized groups” by both well-intentioned and ill-intentioned people (Sue, 2010, p. xv).

---

<sup>2</sup> White is not capitalized throughout this proposal since the term is not one chosen by a people. Capitalizing both “white” and “black” implies symmetry in status that is not reality. The designation “Black” arose as a response to racialization and white supremacist beliefs undergirding the negative stigmatization of Blacks by mainstream white society and its people. It is a resistance response as well as a response of community affirmation. The same cannot be said regarding white persons.

My intent here was not to merely describe the incidents, but instead to extract from the students' self-recollections descriptions of the resources used in the face of demeaning incidents. I hypothesized that spirituality/religiosity was a salient resource in how Black males made meaning of these events/situations, and in how they restored their self-efficacy and well-being. Encounters with racial microaggressions, if not managed or transcended, might influence a decision to drop out of college.

The research questions for this dissertation emerged from an analysis of literature that examined the relationship between spirituality and academic success (Walker & Dixon, 2002; Graham, Furr, Flowers, & Burke, 2001; Christian & Barbarin, 2001; Bowen-Reid & Smalls, 2004). Research on Black male college students has documented the need for programs and commitments that will foster educational attainment and college completion for this population (Harper, 2005; Cuyjet, 2006). In an effort to determine what factors may contribute to the success of Black males in college, I held that spirituality must be centrally included in the discussion on the factors that encourage retention and college success.

#### The Current State of Black Males in Higher Education

While multi-year, empirical research data on enrollment and completion rates of Black males who attended community colleges are not available, these data are available for Black men who attended four year colleges and universities. In 2002, as in 1976, Black men comprised only 4.3% of all students enrolled at all four-year institutions for higher education (Harper, 2005). Startlingly, there was no change in the percentage of Black men in higher education institutions over a twenty-six year period. Research on four-year colleges has shown that whites exhibited a 60% graduation rate and Black

women exhibited a 43% completion rate, while the rate hovered around 30% for Black men (Harper, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). The personal, social, and educational challenges that influence young Black males today must be taken into consideration in order to understand fully why some complete college and others do not. Though there was an overall increase in the percentage of Black males enrolled in higher education from 2002-2004, partially explained by the large percentage of Black male athletes in Division 1 sports (30.5% of all student athletes, 54.6% of all football teams; 60.8% of all basketball teams), 67.6% of Black men who started college in degree-granting programs at four-year institutions failed to graduate in six years (Harper, 2006a).

A bevy of credible researchers have generated possible explanations for what has been dubbed under-achievement. Various colleges, universities and national associations have issued reports on this phenomenon. The perspectives about Black students have typically been presented from an observer's point of view, rather than that of the actual students.

This exploratory study, and research that I will conduct in the future, will add to what higher education researchers know about the ways students make meaning of their challenges, obstacles, achievements, and non-achievements in academic settings.

### Black Males and the College Experience

The statistics on the health and economic challenges facing Black communities are daunting. But a college education can offer new choices where previously there have been few. Many Blacks have sought this pathway to empowerment. For many Black men,

community college has been the entry point into higher education. One particular problem at the community college level has been that Black males were not graduating from community colleges in the same proportions as their white peers (AACC.nche.edu, 2010); at the time of this study, 50% of Black males who attended a community college dropped out within the first two years (NCES, 2012).

In a study on Black male students at public flagship universities, Harper (2006) brought to light many of the issues and concerns that must be considered and addressed regarding the general status of Black males in college. He pointed out huge disparities between the percentage of Black males in the general population compared to those enrolled in colleges and universities. Recruitment policies and practices may have been a significant factor, but for many Black men these issues are different from those that resulted in the failure to complete a degree or certificate.

In addition to the many social and personal concerns that may be an impediment to their academic achievement, Black males must shoulder the added stresses that accompany perceptions and stereotypes on campus about who they are (Washington, 1996). These stresses may contribute to their failure to complete college or their decision to drop out.

Research has shown that the campus racial environment can affect the academic achievement of Black students (Davis, 1994; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hall, 2001; Museus, 2008; Harper, 2012). Many Black students feel that the stereotypes used to define them created a tense racial climate. These stereotypes were rooted in beliefs that Blacks were intellectually inferior and were given concessions to compensate for perceived academic deficiencies. Negative stereotypes connected to culture and

intelligence could reduce Black students' motivation to achieve academic success (Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2002; Sue, 2010). Many Black students reported having stereotypical verbal insults and remarks directed toward them (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Lesage et al., 2002). These stereotypes guided the behaviors of some of the whites they encountered on campus; they were compounded by the myth that Black males are violent, temperamental, primitive, and child-like (Hall, 2001; Sue, 2010). Encounters with tense campus racial environments may have negatively influenced not only academic achievement, but also the desire to remain in school or seek other life or career opportunities.

Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2002) studied campus racial climates and explored “racial microaggressions,” the subtle insults—verbal, nonverbal, or visual—directed at people of color, many times overtly, sometimes unconsciously (p. 60). In their qualitative study, they examined the experiences of Black students who discussed their feelings of isolation and frustration as they struggled to maintain good academic standing while negotiating what they termed “negative racial climates” (p. 69). The various forms of incidents with racial overtones that have occurred on college campuses were often masked and nuanced in the microaggressions portrayed in Figure 1. The pervasive occurrence of racial microaggressions was often missed or overlooked by perpetrators, but could create emotional havoc for those victimized (Sue & Constantine, 2007). For Black males, such barriers to their full participation as students may have been another factor contributing to the steady decline in the retention of Black males in college (Harper, 2012). But what about those who continue on? How did they negotiate these situations?



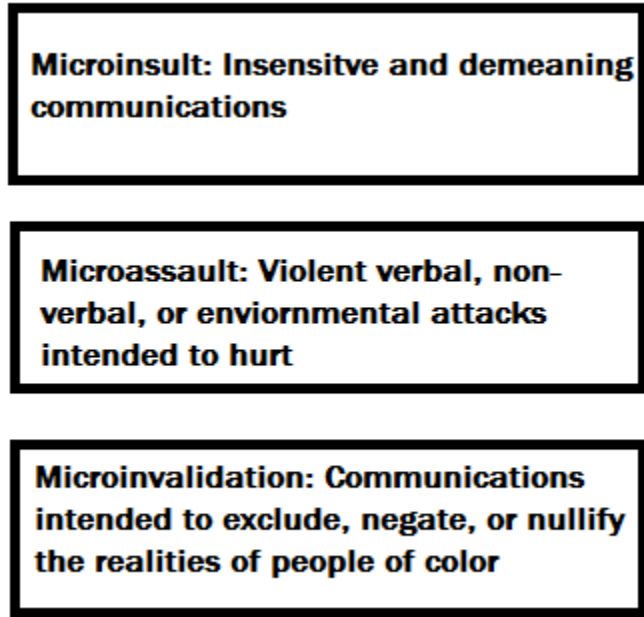


Figure 1. Racial Microaggressions. (*Verbal, Nonverbal, Environmental; Conscious or Unconscious*)

Many Black males have achieved in spite of the odds; 30% of all Black males enrolled in 4-year institutions graduate, many of whom attended a community college at one point (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). If racial barriers have been defined, and many Black male college students persisted in spite of them, it is important to consider the factors that contributed to their persistence, resilience, and commitment to educational attainment. My hypothesis for this research was that since spirituality and religiosity—the commitment made to a “Higher Power” —have long been guiding forces in the Black experience in America (Mazama, 2002; Frazier, 1974), they would be major factors in fostering educational attainment for Black male community college students. If

Black males can expect to encounter racial microaggressions as they pursue higher education, spirituality may foster persistence and tenacity.

#### Spirituality: Operational Definitions

Definitions of religion and spirituality for Black males were needed to guide the data collection and analysis. A body of literature has emerged that deals with the concept of spirituality as separate and distinct from religiosity (religion). One group of researchers has stated that spirituality, a word with Latin roots meaning “breath of life,” is a way of living and being that involves a transcendent awareness of values rooted in self, nature, life, and however one defines the Divine or Ultimate (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988, p. 11).

There have been many attempts at defining spirituality by scholars in business, education, health, psychology, and social sciences (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011, p. 14). In a definition put forth by Astin, Astin, & Lindholm (2011), ten measures were identified: charitable involvement, ecumenical worldview, spiritual quest, equanimity, ethic of caring, religious commitment, religious/social conservatism, religious skepticism, religious engagement, and religious struggle.

The spiritual, not to be confused with organized religion, is an inner energy that sustains and connects people as participants in ever-evolving human and ecological systems. The spiritual speaks to our essence, our life potential, and an understanding of life as a self-transformational journey (Chatters, 1994; Newlin, Knafl, & D’Eramo, 2002; Buck, 2006). The umbrella term spirituality was used here to encompass both the religious and the spiritual. Over 90% of Americans believe in a higher power or God, and

this belief does not require church attendance or an adherence to a religious philosophy (Delgado, 2005; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Riggins, McNeal, & Herndon, 2008).

### Problem Statement and a Personal Reflection

Though many Black males are pursuing higher education at community colleges, they are not graduating. Their academic preparedness may be a concern, but researchers have suggested that the campus environment may not provide the support they need (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). When the support is there, many do achieve (Harper, 2012).

As a Black male educator with nearly three decades of teaching experience at a community college, I have witnessed the steady decline of Black males accessing higher education opportunities and the shrinking numbers of Black males completing degree and certificate programs. At one point in my academic career I was Director of Counseling at an urban community college that was nearly 90% Black and Latino/a. In addition to my regular teaching commitments, over the past two years I have taught behavioral and social science at a local prison to inmates interested in pursuing higher education once they are released. I have been actively creating bridges between higher educational institutions and urban males by developing preparatory opportunities that will groom them for college.

I have counseled urban males with PTSDs (post-traumatic stress disorders), addiction concerns (alcohol and drugs), anger management issues, and general depression. In my work at a public community college and in my private counseling practice with clients, I see the effects of racism upon the Black male population. I have

found that some Black males respond to acts of racism and racial microaggressions with acts of violence, often landing them in jail or with criminal records. After initially being victimized by acts of racism, if they react with violence, they may end up with legal dealings that leave them further victimized.

My motivation to pursue this research is driven by what I have seen and lived. As a tenured community college professor who has developed teaching strategies incorporated as “spiritual pedagogy and andragogy,” I have become aware of what seems to work for Black males who have been out of the higher education loop because of personal problems, criminal histories, poor performance in secondary school, poverty and homelessness, and a lack of access to opportunities. Those men who are committed to a 12-step program, have a church affiliation (formal), or a defined spiritual commitment (personal, informal) seem to be more resilient and persistent and appear to achieve more than those who do not have those involvements.

During my college years I encountered racism and racial microaggressions. My work on this research problem began with a commitment to the scientific practices needed to conduct credible research and shed light on how racism and racial microaggressions impact the community college experience of Black males. I sought to explore how their religion and spirituality does, and can, influence the choices they make when confronted with the subtleties of racial microaggressions and the intensity of overt acts of racism.

## Community College Populations

Since the incarceration rate of young Black males is on the rise nationally, we are looking at a group that is at the highest risk. The frightening homicide rates for Black males between the ages of 18 and 25 are both sad and disturbing (U.S. Office of Minority Health, CDC, 2009). These facts, along with the other demographics highlighted in the introduction, made it clear that research was needed that can provide an understanding of what might be done to change these trends. Since education is one of the few areas that provide hope for a better life, in this research I have focused on the strategies used by Black males who attended a community college that encouraged their success and equipped them with the tools to manage adversity.

As of 2008, the majority of community colleges (95%) had open enrollment and open admissions policies that provided easier access to higher education; students did not have to demonstrate academic proficiency beyond the high school diploma or GED to enroll (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Community Colleges, 2008). Of male and female Black undergraduates attending college in 2008, 46% attended community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2009). Black students reported receiving benefits from their community college experiences that exceeded those reported by white students; they perceived noticeable increases in personal and social development and stronger career preparation than students from other groups (Bryant, 2001).

Esters and Mosby (2007) found Black, non-Hispanic, male students at community colleges had the lowest graduation rate (16%) of any racial group. They were harsh in their criticism of the funding policy priorities in higher education at both the state and

federal level, which failed to finance programs for people of color. They advocated that the status of Black males in higher education needed to be addressed immediately. Esters and Mosby felt that meaningful corrective action had not been taken. Similarly, Harper (2006) asserted that the commitment to education that is part of the democratic ideal, as evidenced in higher education institutions touting access and equity for all, had been breached for Black men at public colleges and universities. The educational needs of Black male students were not being met. Black males attending community colleges lagged behind all other racial groups in college completion rates (Esters & Mosby, 2007), but some did achieve and graduate better prepared for today's harsh economic climate. Examining the factors that promoted their success is a worthy and important research endeavor (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001).

Community colleges have not been addressing the needs of minority populations. This is evident in the low graduation rates (Bailey, T., Calcagno, J. C., Jenkins, D., Kenzi, G. S., & Leinbach, D. T., 2005). A focus on success at the community college level could impact the demographics that define Black males in urban areas. Community colleges need to provide learning environments that are small enough to address individual student needs. Research suggests that there may be a connection between the lower graduation rates of community colleges with large percentages of minority students and larger percentages of part-time faculty (Bailey, et al., 2005). If community colleges are to increase graduation rates for Black males, they must provide benchmarks for success that will sequentially foster motivation for them to achieve. In their research, Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach (2005) found that at 37%, Blacks had the lowest college

completion rate (lower than Latinos, Asians, and whites). They did find, however, that Blacks had the highest completion rates in certificate programs.

As students leave home for college, whether to attend a commuter institution or a residential campus, many need support systems and want to be connected to those things that provide comfort and security. Just as the Black church, long identified as the most powerful communal institution in Black communities, was instrumental in creating a family for those in the community who did not have one, research shows that there has been a spiritual complement in college life that helped to keep Black males actively involved, grounded in their commitments, and focused on achieving academic success (Chatters, Taylor, Lincoln, & Schroepfer, 2002).

The possibility of encountering racial microaggressions and overt racism must not be discounted when examining factors that impede success for Black male college students. Recent literature discussed the relationship of religion to academic success (Riggins, McNeal, & Herndon, 2008). The tools that provided the energy needed to battle the odds and persist were connected to a religious or spiritual orientation or commitment that provided the person with the wisdom needed to manage the conflicts while remaining goal-focused (Herndon, 2003; Berkel, Armstrong, & Cokley, 2004). Spirituality and religiosity, defined as one's religious orientation, have been topics for study and examination to determine what utility they have for Black male college students (Phillips, 2000; Chatters, 1994). Black students had and continue to have options they could seek out to help them in their drive to succeed. These might be tied into a wellspring of energy they have amassed over their lives through their association with individuals, groups, or life-guiding philosophies.

Spirituality and religiosity have been recognized as forces of will that sustained Blacks through over three hundred years of slavery in America; religious orientations grounded in the early life experiences and culture of Blacks males are a part of their social development (Asante, 1987; Lincoln, 1963; Frazier, 1974). They do not disappear when students register for college. Religious or spiritual orientations may provide the support the students need to manage racial microaggressions. Religious-spiritual orientations tend to change or alter how people view their lives, and they can be an important component in encouraging positive life outcomes. A guiding life philosophy may provide meaning and purpose for those who have life challenges to manage. For Black males in institutions of higher learning, a life philosophy may allow for a greater sense of meaning and a stronger sense of control in the campus environments they encounter as college students.

#### Dissertation Topic and Focus

This dissertation examined the lives of fifteen Black males who attended one of three community colleges in a metropolitan area in the northeastern region of the United States and inquired how they experienced racial microaggressions. I explored how these Black males managed racial microaggressions and persisted in completing their studies. Further, it has explored the role religion and spirituality may have played in processing and countering the impact and effects of racial microaggressions. The goal of this research was to gain insight into how Black males who attended a community college may have experienced and utilized their spirituality.



This research explores how spirituality may have been used as a coping mechanism, or a tool of tolerance or transcendence, for these Black males who encountered racial microaggressions as they sought to fulfill their educational goals. Through this research I investigated the pervasiveness and influence of spirituality as an expressed value among this sampled population.

#### Research Questions: Primary Research Question

*How, if at all, does spirituality influence the responses to racial microaggressions of Black males who have attended a community college?*

If these racial encounters are managed positively, their effects on Black male students may be lessened. Some Black males, however, may need to garner inner and personal strength to assist them in negotiating these challenges and making the right choices. The primary research question explores what utility, if any, a religious or spiritual orientation might have in influencing or guiding the choices they must make when confronted with racial microaggressions. Given the fact that they can expect to encounter racial microaggressions and racism on college campuses (Washington, 1996; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Museus, 2008), can their spirituality keep them focused on their academic plans when these events occur?

#### Secondary Research Questions

*What responses have Black males who have attended a community college chosen when confronted with racial microaggressions?*

*How do Black males who have attended a community college experience their religion or spirituality when confronted with racial microaggressions?*

This exploratory research will contribute to the evolving body of knowledge about black student populations on campuses across the country.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

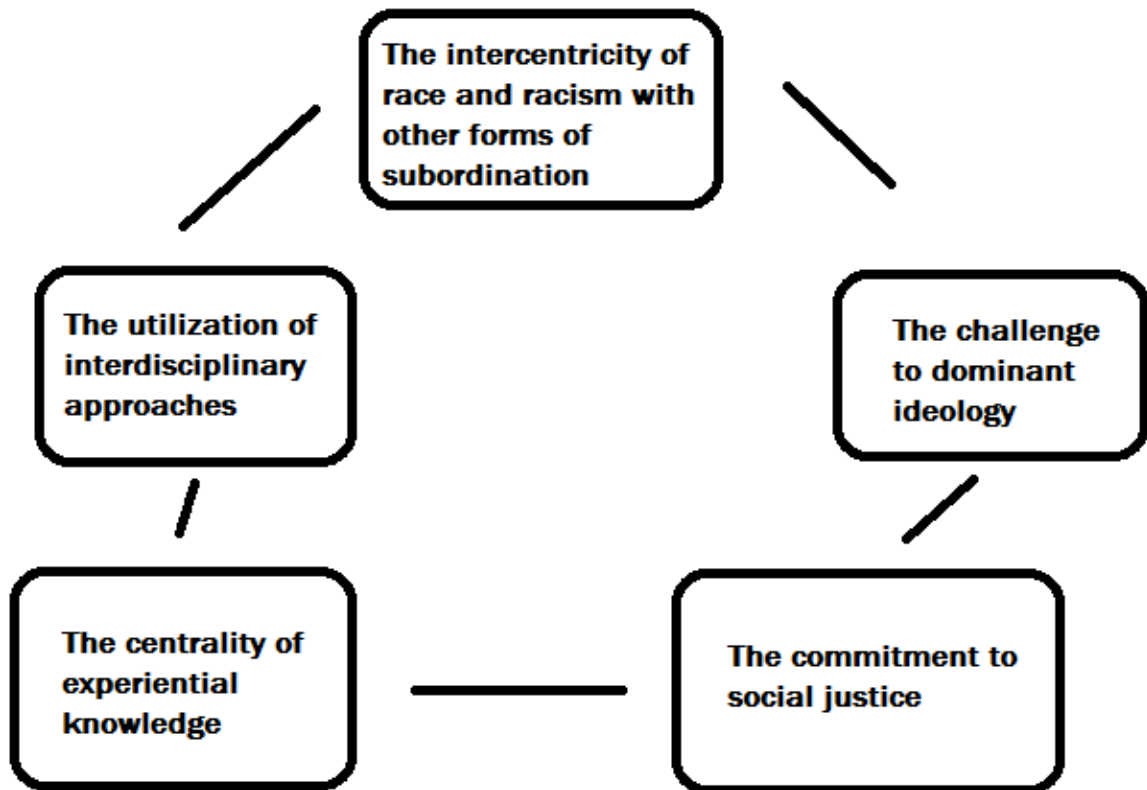
#### Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT), with its emphasis on narrative scholarship and deconstruction, provided the theoretical lens to assess the literature on campus racial climates, racial microaggressions and stereotypes, and religiosity and spirituality.

Critical Race Theory emerged in the 1970s within Law Reviews in the work of Derrick Bell (1987), Delgado and Stefancic (2005), and others who were dissatisfied with standard liberal legal approaches to racial justice. Mainstream scholars in the past refused to accept racism as mainstream in America, choosing, instead, to look upon racial power as “rare and aberrational rather than as systemic and ingrained” (Crenshaw, 1995, p. xiv; Scott, 1997). To view racial power as rare is to diminish the importance of race and how it impacts the lives of all Americans. To accept the importance of racism in the study of education is to look at its influence on the lives of those stigmatized as “intellectually inferior.” Education scholars are now giving more attention to the impact of race in order to “make sense of persistent racial inequities in U. S. schools” (Ladson-Billings, p. 115, 2005).

Critical Race Theory in legal scholarship and in sociology dealt with the power issues facing groups of people who were marginalized and whose human dignity was disrespected (Collins, 2004, p. 8; Adams & Sadie, 2001, p. 423). Progressive scholars

sought to better understand how laws were written, interpreted, and enforced in the United States in ways that perpetuated the power imbalance inherent in dominant/subordinate structures and practices (Figure 2).



*Figure 2.* Critical Race Theory. The five tenets of CRT as explained by Solórzano (2007, 2008).

CRT has taken an important role in higher education scholarship and the study of inequities in access and achievement (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). The work of W. E. B. Du Bois, Patricia Hill Collins, Derrick Bell, Kimberle Crenshaw, bell hooks, and Gloria Ladson-Billings, among others, focused on racialization and whiteness as critical to understanding the challenges evident in living, marginalized, as a Black person in America.

CRT assesses race as a social construct, presenting a broad and inclusive understanding of what it means to be a member of a stigmatized population in a society defined by a dominant hegemonic hierarchy. Multiple truths are not embraced (Collins, 1998; Bell, 2004; Singer, 2005; Freire, 1970; Carter, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2005).

Critical Race Theory holds that whiteness is the standard criterion around which discussions on educational attainment and achievement have been framed. CRT scholars stress the importance of understanding white privilege in order to understand how power operates in educational systems defining who will have access to the tools that foster success (Singer, 2005; hooks, 2003). By acknowledging the pervasiveness of unearned white privilege and its negative impact on those who are not white, we can appropriately study the power dynamics that may influence if, how, and why some Black males who have attended a community college excelled and achieved in spite of the dynamics of race.

The struggle for equality has dramatically affected the social and psychological history of Blacks in America (White & Parham, 1990). Some posited the centrality of the Black worldview, perceptions defined by the African-rooted Black center (Asante, 1987;

Adams & Sydie, 2001; White & Parham, 1990). This realistic approach acknowledged the seeming permanence of racism and the need for justice and truth (Bell, 1992). In spite of the potentially destructive effects of racism, ranging from microaggressions to threats of violence and death, many Black males have had the personal and social resources to externalize the stress and live healthy, productive lives (Jones, R., 2004).

The stories told by those who were oppressed had an important place in the methods used by CRT researchers (Bell, 2003; Delgado, 1995). Building on an understanding of the impact of race and class, Gloria Ladson-Billings explored the persistence and pervasiveness of racism while asserting that coupled with this awareness was a vision of hope for change (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; see also Freire, 1970). “Counterstories” have and must be used as a research tool to challenge the accounts of those who retain power and control in a society or culture (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

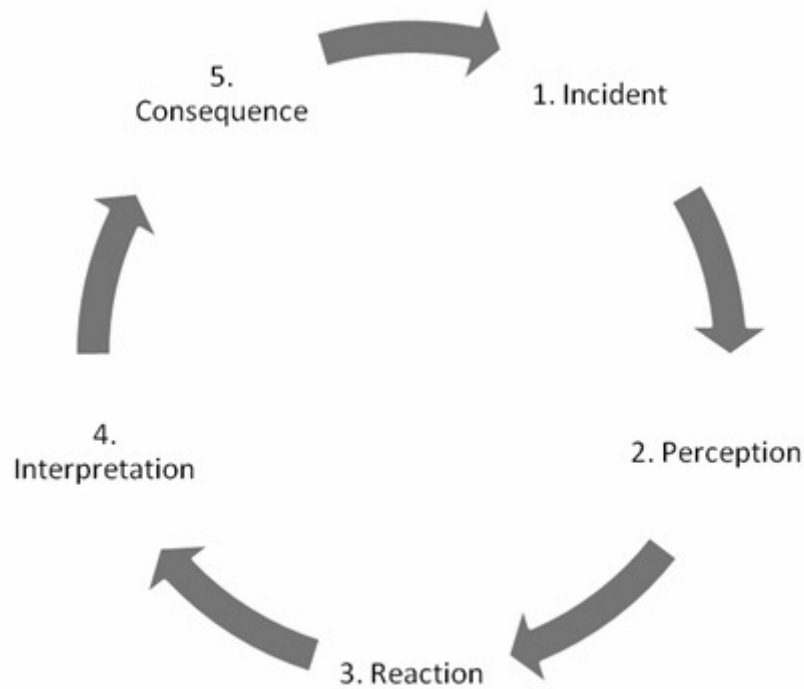
### Racial Microaggressions

The racial microaggression literature identifies and examines the impact that judgments by non-Blacks may have on Blacks. While the term “microaggression” is relatively new in current academic circles (Sue, 2010), how the phenomenon of power plays to denigrate persons who are different from the white standard has been well documented in the social sciences. The full spectrum of its impact, however, is not.

A phrase coined by Black psychiatrist Chester Pierce over 40 years ago, “racial microaggressions” developed into a concept utilized and analyzed by educators, behavioral and social scientists, sociologists, and health care professionals. In his article

titled “Offensive Mechanisms,” Pierce encouraged the study of superiority and offensive behaviors that are used by those in power to “brutalize, degrade, abuse, and humiliate another group of individuals” (Barbour, 1970, p. 265). Establishing a seeming continuum, he held that a “macro-aggression” would be a violent action like lynching while a “micro-aggression” would take the form of a common and everyday offensive that seems harmless, but may have dramatic and traumatizing effects on a victim. The power of Pierce’s work was further evidenced by his defining racism as a public and mental health problem and concern. This shift in focus allowed for the development and formulation of new ways of thinking about racism and racial aggression.

The work of Pierce was foundational and allowed for the development of more work in this field, some of which yielded a Microaggression Process Model (Figure 3) which has been developed and tested to deepen understanding of how an individual experiences a microaggression that may be rooted in racism, sexism, or homophobia (Sue, 2010). Internal psychological dynamics occur when an individual experiences a racial microaggression: a series of phases (domains) influence the social interactions of the recipient of a racial microaggression (Sue, 2010).



*Figure 3. Racial Microaggression Process Model. This figure shows the domains (phases) in the process: (Internal Psychological Dynamics (Sue, 2010))*

According to this model, when an incident occurs, a process is triggered whereby the participant assesses whether or not the incident was racial (perception); develops a response (reaction) that may be connected to the cognitive (thinking), behavioral (acting), or emotional (feeling) dimensions of the participant’s mental process; and extracts meaning (interpretation) from the occurrence; that may probe the possible intentions of the perpetrator; and processes the effects (consequences and impact) in the moment and over time. This conceptual framework, based on earlier scholarship by Pierce, and studies conducted by Sue’s research teams, facilitates analysis of the immediate and long-term



effects of racial microaggressions on those who have been victimized. It builds upon earlier analyses. The ongoing documentation of overt acts of racism on college campuses (ex., *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2007, p 108-109) and the research findings that the “most highly publicized racial incidents, ranging from verbal harassment to violent beatings, occurred at some of the most elite institutions in the country” (Hurtado, 1992, p. 539) are important to our understanding of the campus climate Black males face. If encountering or addressing racism, either in its overt or covert forms, is a part of the college experience for Black males, they may need support structures they can access when they encounter racial conflict.

In his quest to understand the conditions of life in America for Blacks, W. E. B. Du Bois understood power and control as dominant forces in the oppression of Blacks (Adams & Sydie, 2001, p. 295). His early understanding of the duality of being Black and American gave meaning to his famous quote that “the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line” (Du Bois, 1961). In his work on race and class, as early as late 19th century, Du Bois noted that though whites and Blacks might work in close proximity, at higher social levels there is more separation of the races (Adams & Sydie, 2001). This observation about how race and class function in American society, along with his personal experiences, explained the “twoness” he described as double-consciousness (Rebeka, 2008). He saw himself as an American, but also as a Black man. He saw himself through his own eyes and also through the eyes of those who were oppressing him. This focus on how a Black person functions in American society suggests living in two cultures or having two identities.

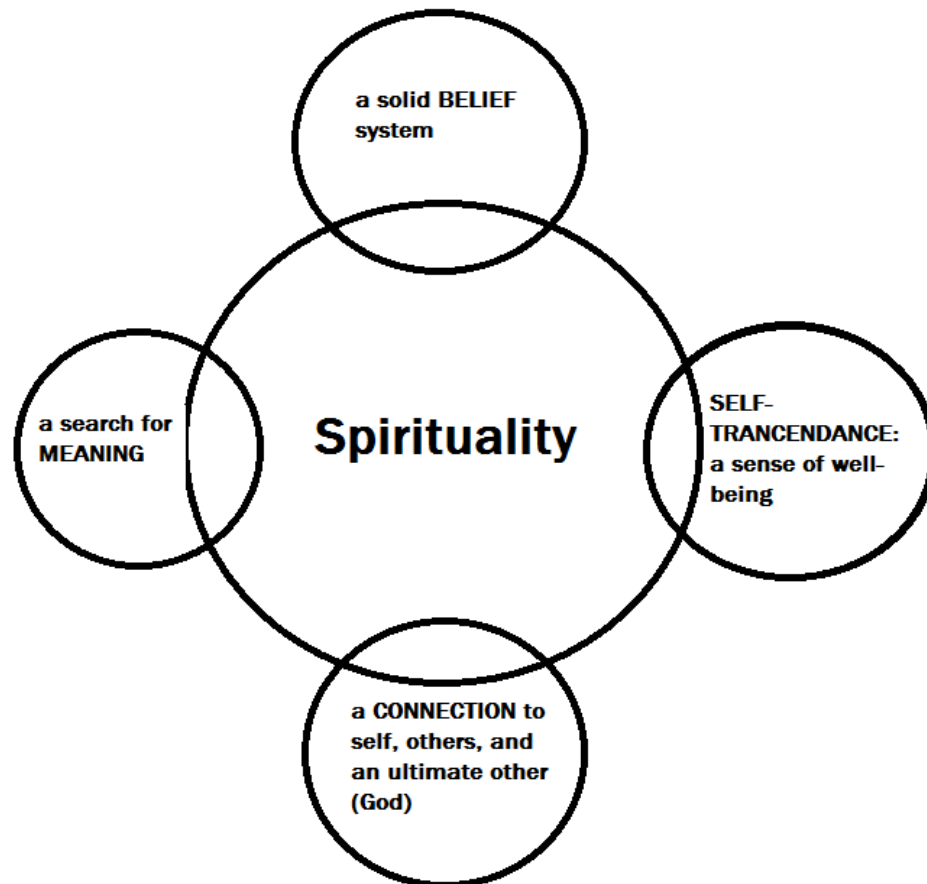
Reactions to racial microaggressions may trigger a psychological dynamic that entangles the victim in a series of assessments that may leave him feeling confused or marginalized if he does not have the tools to process these events in a healthy and realistic way.

### Spirituality/Religiosity

The literature on religion and spirituality provided a historical perspective on the importance of education and religion in the lives of Black Americans and how these two institutions have provided a utility for mobility and growth for Blacks while they battled the challenges of racism. This perspective provided the foundation for the development of HBCU: Historically Black Colleges and Universities. That HBCUs emerged and flourished despite the legal forces of segregation is a testament to their strength and purpose then and today. Religious institutions played a role in the founding and flourishing of Black colleges and universities in America. Religious language and imagery sustained the African American-led freedom movement mid-20th century. Throughout the time of Africans in the Americas, religious institutions served the myriad interests of the Black community, addressing issues related to social justice and liberation.

Definitions of spirituality are subject to debate and scrutiny since there is no one agreed-upon universal definition. There are many definitions of spirituality that have been developed. Astin, Astin, & Lindholm (2011) proposed ten measures, as previously noted. They defined equanimity by exploring what a “spiritual person” would be like. This quality reflects the search for meaning, peace, and purpose the student they studied

identified. For this research on Black males who encounter racial microaggressions, these qualities are important to consider. After reviewing interdisciplinary research I put forward a definition providing a context for this exploratory study. (See Figure 4.)



*Figure 4.* Spirituality. (Delgado, 2005; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Chatters, 1994)

Definitions of spirituality subsumed religion since they accounted for those who may or may not attend a church, synagogue, mosque, or meeting regularly. Further, these definitions were broad enough to accommodate current spiritual practices rooted in Eastern and African ideologies and traditions. Common to all was a belief in a Higher Power or an Ultimate Other. The four elements of the definition are inclusive, suggesting

that a spiritual being has connections to self, others, and God. These connections help to provide meaning to the life of this defined spiritual being.

### Campus Racial Climates

This is an evolving literature on campus racial climates (Museus & Jayakumar, 2011; Museus, 2008). The experience of students of color on college campuses has been studied and documented (Hall & Rowan, 2000; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Research findings note that many Blacks were not fully engaged in campus life and that many felt uncomfortable in this environment. Perceptions about racism and discrimination may have impacted their involvement in campus life.

The United Nations defines racial discrimination as the denial of equality and political, economic, social, and cultural freedoms to any group based on skin color and ethnic origin (United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Racial Discrimination, 1966). This discrimination is often evidenced in exclusion and differential treatment. Racial discrimination is also about the power and control one group has over another, especially in its influence on social institutions (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). This power and differential treatment on college campuses may be evidenced in stereotypical assumptions held, and acted upon by students, faculty members, staff, and administrators. Covert and overt racial assaults impact Black students' perceptions of the institutions they attend and can influence their academic performance and participation in campus life. Given the demands of adjusting to the college experience that many Black males must confront and integrate into their lives, issues of race and inclusion can be a deterrent to their focus on educational attainment.

One study that synthesized over fifteen years of research on campus racial climates identified important themes (Harper & Hurtado, 2007): evidence of the visible segregation of students by race and ethnicity; the avoidance or failure of any meaningful dialogue on race; the dissatisfaction of Black students with the campus social environment; the assumption by many white students that Black, Latino, and Native American students are satisfied with campus social environments; and the lack of shared spaces on campus where minority students feel comfortable. This suggested that many students of color on college campuses were isolated in their social experiences (see also Museus, 2008).

The perception of racism, prejudice, and discrimination complicated and compounded the adjustments Black students have had to make as they pursued a college education. Responding to the stereotypes about their academic credibility and intellectual ability can influence their intellectual functioning, identity development, and performance (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000), and can have an alienating effect on Black students (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). If a Black student in this environment was also a high achiever, he or she may have experienced even further isolation and alienation (Fries-Britt, 1998) because of the desire to excel in an environment that was not inclusive. These challenges of campus life were not experienced by white students and white faculty who may lack an analysis and understanding of the realities of this aspect of the college experience of Black students (Lewis, Chester, & Forman, 2000).

Polite and Davis (1999) spoke of Black students as at-risk. In their study on Black students on predominantly white campuses, D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993)

found that the only discernible difference between the white group and the Black group they studied was the experience of racial discrimination for the Black students. Campus racism, both covert and overt, was not uncommon and spoke to a general failure of colleges and universities and society-at-large to address adequately the unresolved racial issues (Hurtado, 1992). Unresolved racial issues are time bombs waiting to explode at any provocation. Focusing specifically on Black males, Hall & Rowan (2000) identified the campus environment, racism, and cultural insensitivity as oppressive forces that can lead to isolation, anxiety, and apathy for Black males on college campuses. Many students perceived higher education institutions as hostile environments. Some Black students, in an effort to be accepted and to survive in a hostile environment, shifted back and forth from racially aware behavior to deracialized behavior (Smith, 1981, p. 301).

Studies have found that many Black students struggle to prove they are intellectually competent (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Museus, 2008) because they have internalized the myths about the intelligence of Black people. The challenge for Black students, if they chose to internalize the stereotypes, was the denial or compromise of their Black identity if they wish to be accepted. Such denial can generate significant levels of stress and anxiety for college students who attempt to appear invisible in an effort to be integrated into a mainstream group. For a Black person, this may be the adoption of mainstream white cultural and social codes that will make them appear less Black, less intimidating, less visible, and less obvious in their Blackness. The more obvious acts would be the adoption of a style of dress that reflects what is trendy and current for whites or the indulgence in a type of music that is mainly associated with whites, for example, heavy metal or punk rock. These social codes acceptable to

whites and adapted by Blacks may impact the identity of these Black students; many of these students are in need of psychological help because of this duality and identity confusion (Osborne, 1997).

Franklin and Boyd-Franklin (2000) studied the effects of racism on the psychological well-being of Black males and found that “encountering repeated racial slights could create within the individual a feeling of not being seen as a person of worth” (p. 33). They suggested that Blacks may feel their true selves “and unique abilities are hidden by a cloak of psychological invisibility woven by attitudes of prejudice and discrimination on the part of others” (p. 34). The arguments that explain the stresses Black males might endure if they attend white colleges and universities with small percentages of Blacks were strengthened by research on Black students, racial stereotypes, and male identity (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Harris III & Harper, 2008). Even in situations of social interaction considered normal, the ongoing effort to manage racial slights, as well as the confusion and disillusionment induced by persistent acts of racism, undermined the resilience of some Blacks, leading to deterioration in their ability to cope, whether on a transient or more enduring basis (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000). Some adjust. Some do not.

### Locus of Control

Locus of control refers to the expectation that a behavioral outcome is attributable to personal characteristics as opposed to chance, luck, or outside income. This variable has been studied in psychology and other social sciences because it seeks to explain and identify the motivations of human beings (Rotter, 1990). Locus of control of

reinforcement is introduced in this research to expand on our understanding of how individuals make sense of the world they live in. How beliefs are constructed provides insight into their utility for individuals who may confront challenges and obstacles. Whether or not an individual feels they have control over the events that occur in their lives can affect their beliefs about themselves and their self-efficacy (Ajzen, 2002).

When confronted with challenges, many individuals may feel out of control and believe that an external element guides or reinforces behavioral outcomes for them. Individuals' intentions and actions must be taken into account as they seek to master and understand their challenges (Rotter, 1971; Ajzen, 2002). Definitions of spirituality and religiosity provide an understanding of how individuals make meaning of the events that occur in their lives. The locus of control theory may provide insight into how individuals explain those destinies they cannot change (Rotter, 1971). Given that most definitions of spirituality and religiosity include a reliance or belief in a Higher Power, this Higher Power may function as the external arbiter that influences outcomes and consequences. The intersection of these two approaches informs the utility of spirituality for some people, that is, it may relieve them of having to take responsibility for their reactions by assigning those duties to a Higher Power.

### Racism, Discrimination, and Prejudice

According to the research on diversity and multiculturalism, a common thread defines racism as a belief that one "race" is demonstrably superior to others (Kitano, 1985; Jones, 1972; Bucher, 2010). Discrimination is defined as an action or actions directed toward members of a particular group based on racism (race superiority)



(Kitano, 1985; Bucher, 2010). These acts of discrimination are often formalized into what has been termed “institutional racism,” which are the practices that “differentially and negatively affect members of a subordinate racial group” (Feagin & Feagin, 2012, p. 20). This term is distinguished from individual racism, which is defined as the hostile actions taken by an individual against members of a racial group (Schaefer, 2013; Feagin & Feagin, 2012). Institutional racism may be evidenced in the policies adopted by groups or organizations that exclude, marginalize, oppress, or disempower members of a targeted racial group.

#### Racial Microaggressions and Stereotypes

Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) explored the links between racial stereotypes (negative preconceptions), cumulative racial microaggressions (subtle denigrating messages), campus racial climate, and academic performance. They found that “racial microaggressions in both academic and social spaces had real consequences, the most obvious of which were the resulting negative racial climate and African American students’ struggles with feelings of self-doubt and frustration as well as isolation” (p. 69). Racial microaggressions, expressed as insults and “put-downs” directed at Blacks, often had damaging consequences that may have been hidden (Sue, 2010). In examining how Black college students experienced and responded to racial microaggressions, they found that while educational conditions might appear to be equal, inequality and discrimination still existed—albeit in more subtle and hidden forms (p. 71). In analyzing the importance of collegiate racial climate, the researchers concluded that “the cumulative effects of racial microaggressions can be devastating” (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, p. 72).

On many college campuses, dialogues on race have been avoided because fear inhibited open discussions and thus became a barrier to change (Sue & Constantine, 2007). The chasm between whites and Blacks on college campuses has widened as many faculty, staff, and administrators have fail to model behaviors for change. Fueled by a fear of confronting their racist tendencies, avoidance replaced action. Therefore, the microaggressions weighed heavily on the subordinated group members as they attempted to manage the emotional costs they paid (McCabe, 2009).

Sue, Nadal, Capodilupo, Lin, Torino, and Rivera (2008) offered a hypothetical taxonomy on microaggressions, delineating their expressions as microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Racial microaggressions (see Figure 2) are the overarching verbal and behavioral indignities hurled at people of color (Sue, 2010). Under the umbrella of microaggressions are the rude and insensitive comments made that are defined as microinsults; microassaults are explosive verbal outbursts. Sue's taxonomy defines microinvalidations as communications that exclude, negate or nullify the experience of people of color (2010). Other researchers have provided insights into the recurring themes noted in microaggressions and their harmful and cumulative impact (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, et al., 2007; McCabe, 2009). Many Blacks in these studies reported feeling marginalized, invisible, excluded and negated. Black males, specifically, reported being perceived as threatening, aggressive, and criminal (McCabe, 2009). In her work on cross-racial counseling, Constantine (2007) found that the perception of racial microaggressions by Blacks inhibited and crippled the therapeutic process. This suggests that even in structured situations that focus on providing help and support, the perception of racism and racial microaggressions has a

negative impact. The impact of covert and overt acts of racism on the lives of Black male community college students can be understood through Sue's five domains: (see Figure 3 above) incident, perception, reaction, interpretation, and consequence (2010).

Racism may not always be overtly expressed, but it exists (Sue, 2010). The belief that we have inherited racist traditions, and that they are a part of our social conditioning has not been actively disputed. Because of the subtleties of acts and actions as noted in Sue's taxonomy of microaggressions, the themes and messages of racism are embedded in how we view the intelligence of Blacks, their rights to citizenship, their culture and value, their mode of communication, their sexuality, their criminal status, and their acceptance as "normal" human beings (Sue, 2010).

By invalidating any group, barriers to access to opportunities are imposed and the false justifications fuel a pattern of oppression. How one views the world "serves as a prism from which data and information are filtered" (Sue, 2010, p. 45).

The work of Steele (1995) on "stereotype threat" revealed that the test performance of Black students is depressed when there is presence of the stereotype that Blacks are inferior to whites. In his extensive research (1995 and 2010 in particular), Steele focused on the immediate situational threat derived from the broad dissemination of negative stereotypes (Steele, 1995, p. 798). Other research tends to support the hypothesis by linking stereotype threat with anxiety and studying its impact on withdrawal from school (Osborne & Walker, 2006; Osborne, 2007).

In the study on stereotype threat and anxiety, Osborne (2007) found that an increase in anxiety caused by the existence of a stereotype threat not only decreased performance, but also made the situation aversive to students, which promoted an

exodus from campus (p. 136). This finding may explain, in part, why many Black male students choose to drop out of school or retreat from situations when a racial stereotype is evident, either overtly or covertly. The options for the student, as Osborne noted, are “absenteeism or withdrawal” with many choosing “psychological disidentification” with being a student; where they choose not to display any interest or attachment to the academic task or subject at hand. This type of withdrawal can be temporary, but in some cases, it is temporarily generalized to all academic endeavors. As a result of his research that revealed a correlation between self-esteem and academic outcomes (p.733), Osborne (1997) stated that Black males, as a group, are particularly, and perhaps uniquely, vulnerable to disidentification.

One important argument in Steele’s work was that the existence of a negative stereotype about one’s group meant that in situations where the stereotype was applicable, one was at risk of confirming it as a self-characterization (Steele, 1995, p. 808). In uncovering the possible links between test anxiety and test performance for Black college students, Steele’s findings are compelling. Black participants expecting to take a difficult, diagnostic test of abilities showed significantly greater cognitive activation of stereotypes about Blacks, greater cognitive activation of concerns about their ability, a greater tendency to avoid racially stereotypic preferences, a greater tendency to make advance excuses for their performance, and finally, a greater reluctance to have their racial identity linked to their performance even in the pedestrian way of recording it on questionnaires (Steele, 1995, p. 805). This research clearly showed the impact stereotypes have on performance, test anxiety, and self-perception. It linked the

concerns individuals had about how society perceived them with their perceptions of themselves which led to their questioning their own social identities.

Steele's current work on identity contingency, the "judgments, stereotypes, opportunities, restrictions, and treatments that are tied to one's social identity in a given setting," places it in a broader context with stereotype threat as a component (Steele, 2010; see also Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008). The many social identities assumed in life can be threatened if a stereotype about an identity can be applied (Steele, 2010). This latest research offered insight into the everyday experience of a Black male on a community college campus who must be mindful of not only the microaggressions he may encounter, but also the assumptions and stereotypes that may be applied to some of his social identities, such as Black, male, or young.

#### Black Males Encountering Racial Microaggressions

Students' experiences with "everyday racism" ranged from racial microaggressions that could be easily dismissed to more overt encounters that lingered in their memories (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). These encounters lead to stress, requiring the use of coping strategies to alleviate stress and promote well-being (Barnes & Hightsey, Jr., 2005). Those Blacks who sought counseling services or support systems ranked racism as high on their list of problems (Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000).

Researchers have examined the experiences of Black males seeking higher education (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007; Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry, & Stanley, 2007). In addition to impacting academic status and standing,

encounters with racism produced stresses that can potentially affect the mental and physical health of Black male college students (Utsey & Payne, 2000; Hill, Kobayashi, & Hughes, 2007).

For many Blacks in college, their struggle to succeed is often challenged when they are made to feel they are not worthy. These feelings emerge when they encounter racial slights that can create feelings that their identity, worth and value are undermined by acts of racism and discrimination (Franklin, 1999; Franklin, 2000). For some Black students who seek out their white professors for help and support, many find them detached, discouraging, and “unsympathetic” (Mulhauser, 2001, p. 1).

On campuses where Black students are the majority, the focus was diverted away from race and toward the students’ personal interests (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). In assessing the experiences Black males may anticipate in their college experience, racial discrimination remains a pervasive concern.

In their study on differential treatment, Suarez-Balcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan, and Andrews-Guillen (2003) found that Black students were the target of racism more often than other racial groups and that they experienced more incidents of differential treatment.. For Black males, these issues may be exacerbated by the stereotypes that define who they are, thus increasing the likelihood they will be targeted. They may seek to self-segregate as a defense against the agonies of racism (Feagin & Sikes, 1995). The psychological dynamic of self-segregation can be compounded by racial slights that ignore Black men, suggesting they are not valued or worthy (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000).

The psychological effects of all forms of racism elicit a broad range of responses from its victims. Some respond with anger or rage, others may choose to ignore the acts. The effects can impact motivation, persistence, and adjustment to college life (Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

### Spirituality and Education

Historically, for Blacks, religion was the bridge between slavery and education. It was the foundation that fostered the gradual and ongoing liberation of a people imprisoned by a cruel and sinister system of oppression (Frazier, 1974; Mitchell, 2004). That former white slave owners and white religious institutions would make a commitment, based on religion and morality, to assist in the education of Blacks is important to the study of the religious journey of Blacks in America and the development of Black institutions of higher learning.

White and Black religious institutions forged a commitment to literacy and education for Blacks; however, not all white denominations made this commitment. The Black church was, and is, the most powerful social, political, and religious institution in Black communities. It was in the church that many Blacks were educated (Bennett, 2003; Franklin, 1974).

Though slavery and the dehumanization of Blacks centuries ago resulted in the majority being forced to live and work in plantation regimes, Christianity offered hope and “a theology and new orientation toward the world at large; slaves and former slaves adapted the Christian religion to their psychological and social needs” (Frazier, 1974, p. 19). Along with Christianity and hope came a desire to adapt and advance through

education. Different religious belief systems (Catholic, African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Lutheran, Church of God in Christ, and Pentecostal, among them, including Islam and African religions) have provided Blacks with “meaning” that is grounded in how they experienced life in America and constructed their response to the stress that accompanied their stigmatized status.

The church/faith meeting place was in schools, praying stations, and social halls. The historical role of Black churches as influential and powerful institutions in the Black community has been well documented (Chatters et al., 2002; Williams, 2001). Theologian C. Eric Lincoln has been widely quoted in his description of the Black church as “lyceum, conservatory, forum, social service center, political academy and financial institution... and is for Black America the mother of our culture, the champion of our freedom, the hallmark of our civilization” (Hale, 2001, p. 155). Church leaders functioned as advocates for liberation and freedom for Blacks, and many church leaders continue in these roles today, often including political and social agendas in their “church agendas.” Churches were the steppingstones to education and liberation, for they provided a moral and ethical foundation for their members.

Issues of slavery and human dignity were called into question by many traditional white religions, even though they advocated for segregation by race. The response was that Blacks formed their own churches, and Church life became a critical and important part in the lives of Blacks. Religion “turned their minds from the sufferings and privations of this world to a world after death where the weary would find rest and the victims of injustices would be compensated” (Frazier, 1974, p. 50).



After the Emancipation Proclamation, missionaries, under the protection of military occupation, flooded the South, and the Protestant churches of the North launched crusades to spread literacy (Mitchell, 2004, p. 142). Efforts to found schools and bring literacy to the masses help to explain the development and funding of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in America. There are a total of 105 two-year and four-year, public and private HBCUs in the United States (U. S. Department of the Interior, 2009), each having in its mission a commitment to the education of Blacks and those who choose to ally with them (LeMelle, 2002; Redd, 1998).

Research shows that Black males at HBCUs “felt ‘in charge’...showed greater academic gains, more eagerness to compete, and considerably more social assertion than Black males on Predominantly White Campuses” (Allen, 1992, p. 31). The positive effects of being on a college campus that is predominantly Black seems to have a favorable influence on Black males. The enduring presence of Black religious traditions in Black institutions of higher learning supports the importance of spiritual traditions as tools of power and resilience.

The importance of the campus racial climate, as evidenced by the diversity of the student population, along with the commitment to a church or spiritual community may have a positive influence on Black male community college students. Since community colleges support students who seek career and vocational training or wish to transfer to a 4-year institution, their value for urban residents cannot be overstated (Cohen, 1990). They meet the needs of local communities because they are affordable, accessible, and available (Kasper, 2002-2003). For those Black males with few options, community colleges provide promise.

## The Emergence of Social and Cultural Movements

Personal and social interaction is important to a full college experience. This experience may be lacking for Black students on white campuses where they feel the social environment is not welcoming. Where church affiliations provide havens for fellowship and sharing, these opportunities may be lacking for many Black students on college campuses. Studies are needed that are informed by the experience of both students and chaplains at various institutions.

Sedlacek (1974) asked if there were a “unique Black experience” that can be measured and framed in practical terms (p. 514). In response to this type of question, Resnicow and Ross-Gaddy (1997) looked to the psychological construct, Afrocentricity. This philosophic orientation places African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior, as a way of knowing and processing the experiences of Blacks (p. 240). Inherent in the movement and philosophy of Afrocentricity is the Pan-Africanist belief that Black people in the world can be released from the bondage of oppression if they place themselves at the center of their own lives and use that center as the place from which they view the world (Abarry, 1990; Mazama, 2001; Mazama, 2002, Asante, 1980; Asante, 1987; Constantine, 2002; Mincy, 1994).

Afrocentricity is important to this study of Black males in college because it stresses a strong reliance on spirituality (Mazama, 2002, p. 219). As Jeff (1994) pointed out, “Afrocentrism offers African-American youths positive values such as incorporation and enfranchisement that can help reduce the distance between them and their social environment” (Mincy, p. 105). The study of African philosophy includes a focus on the unity of being while stressing, in a metaphysical sense, the common essence of all things

on the planet, the energy and spirit that is the unifying and driving force (Mazama, 2002). Afrocentricity focuses on culture and “the shared perceptions, attitudes, and pre-dispositions that allow people to organize experiences in certain ways” (Asante, 1990, p. 9). As we consider the many cultural milieus Black males on college campuses might find themselves in, it is important to learn more about and honor the traditions that may explain how they experience campus life.

Little (1980, 2002) offered insight into the challenges Blacks on college campuses confronted during the 19th century, many of which still exist. Though religion was a very important part of life for Black college students, many students did not have access to church communities where they could worship and socialize. Little explained that extra-curricular activities were an important component of the college experience for Blacks since their lives were severely circumscribed by *de facto* and *de jure* segregation, which limited their opportunities for full participation (p. 43). Racial segregation and white hostility to Black higher education necessitated the development of alternative outlets for the intellectual and recreational engagement of Black students (p. 44). Out of this need grew the social clubs and literary circles that defined campus life for Blacks. Rather than suffer or risk humiliation, isolation, physical violence or retaliation for being involved in mainstream campus life and culture, they opted to develop their own collegiate circles. Black student organizations and Black Greek-letter Organizations (BGOs) provided unique leadership opportunities for Blacks on college campuses (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Sedlacek, 1987). The collegiate circles developed by Black students on college campuses gave them an opportunity to create a campus and college life

experience that was peculiar to their group and a cultural context that validated who they were.

### Religiosity and Spirituality

Understanding the evolution of the Black church provides a framework for the analysis of how spirituality influences the choices Black males make while enrolled in college. Black men may choose to avoid situations that are potentially explosive, but they may also use coping strategies, gleaned from their religious training, that arm them with a strong sense of self. This may keep them from actions and behaviors that may be self-defeating. A strong sense of self and a focus on academic goals and educational attainment appears to correlate with spirituality and religiosity.

In a study on spirituality and academic performance, Walker and Dixon (2002) found that high achieving Black students had higher levels of spiritual beliefs which may have influenced achievement by decreasing stress. Graham, Furr, Flowers, and Burke (2001) examined the relationship among religiosity, spirituality, and stress, and determined that there was a positive correlation.. In their study of 148 students, they found that the “more vital one’s spiritual health is, the more numerous are the coping skills” (p. 9). While it must be noted that the study participants were not Black students, the findings may still have implications for the Black male student population because research on college climate and Black students suggests that racism and racial microaggressions produce stress in its victims and impact their ability to cope effectively (Franklin and Boyd, 2000).

It is important that research studies be conducted on issues of spirituality because this focus provides information on how Blacks may choose to attribute, both negatively and positively, events that occur in their lives. Christian and Barbarin (2001) collected data on children from the University of Michigan Family Development Project and assessed the relationship between parental religiosity and racial attribution to child behavioral and emotional problems. They found that parents who attended church reported fewer problems with their children. They also found that “members of stigmatized groups can attribute negative feedback to prejudice against their group [racial attribution]” rather than to something stable and internal (p. 49). This research addressed the internal conflicts that can occur for Blacks when they internalize racism and allow it to influence their self-esteem. By externalizing racism, Blacks may avoid the depression that occurs over time if the negativity is internalized. Self-protective attributions, manifested as strength of character or realistic self-awareness, may serve as coping mechanisms that empower young Black men to transcend the stresses associated with racism and discrimination.

Brome, Owens, Allen and Vevaina (2000) considered spirituality and its relationship to coping and self-concept. Though they studied Black females in substance abuse recovery, their findings can be linked to research that supports the idea that spirituality is connected to positive mental health. The subjects in this study were 146 mothers from the Roxbury Comprehensive Community Health Center in Boston who were recovering from substance abuse. They were tested and divided into high and low spirituality groups. The study tested three hypotheses: Black women in recovery who express higher levels of spirituality will express more positive mental health outcomes;

Black women in recovery who express higher levels of spirituality will also express more positive attitudes about their family climate; and Black women in recovery who express higher levels of spirituality will express a greater satisfaction with social support networks than Black women in recovery who score lower on spirituality indices. All three hypotheses in this study were supported by the findings. The study validated the importance of spirituality in the lives of Blacks and those challenged with social pressures and personal conflicts. The findings showed the relationship between spirituality and positive outcomes and helped to explain the role of spirituality in personal resilience. It provided insight into the possible utility that spirituality may have for Black male community college students confronted with racial microaggressions.

Constantine, Donnelly, and Myers (2002) studied 106 Black adolescent students (mean age 15.25) from the Midwestern region of the United States. They wanted to examine a spiritual-centered Africultural coping style in dealing with stressful situations (p. 698). They found that Black adolescents with positive beliefs about their cultural group used spiritual-centered activities to help them manage stressful situations. These findings supported the research of Asante (1990) on Afrocentricity.

In their study on stress, spirituality, and Black college students, Bowen-Reid and Smalls (2004) observed the stress-related illnesses and health challenges the students confront. Their research revealed that “spirituality and religiosity are rich cultural mores in the African American community,” and that a religious and spiritual commitment served as a buffer between racial stress and negative health outcomes (Bowen-Reid & Smalls, 2004, p. 284). This study was limited in its findings on the extent to which college students self-identified and relied on these constructs to deal with stressful

situations (p. 290). The value of Bowe-Reid & Smalls' research is its suggestion that any model of health that pertains to Blacks should fundamentally include a discussion of spirituality and the role of the Black church since it has historically served as a place of refuge, inspiration, direction, respect and communal support (p. 290).

Similarly, Bryant and Astin (2008) examined national surveys developed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 2000 that drew its sample of freshman from 434 baccalaureate colleges and universities across the country (n=3,680). Their study showed that spiritual struggles were common in the lives of college students, and that underrepresented groups and groups at risk for mistreatment faced more challenges in their spiritual struggles (p. 21). Women reported struggling spiritually more often than men. There was some reluctance to generalize about Black men in Bryant and Astin's study since Blacks comprised such a small percentage of subjects in the project. However, their study revealed that students who are religiously engaged experience less spiritual struggle than the average student (Bryant & Astin, 2008, p. 21).

Smith, Fabricatore, and Peyrot (1999) found Blacks significantly more likely than whites to say that religion was personally important to them (p. 581). They documented prior research that highlighted the positive association between religiosity and well-being, and the ameliorative effect that religious involvement had on personal discontent and the reduction of depression in Black men (p. 582). The study also reported that, "African Americans, more so than whites, seek the church as a haven for cultural support" (p. 593). It revealed that Black males in majority Black parishes expressed

stronger feelings of religiosity and community, and engaged in greater altruism than those in minority Black parishes (p. 594).

Love and Talbot (1999), often cited for their work on student affairs professionals and spirituality, saw spiritual development as an innate aspect of human development (p. 364). Religious experiences appeared to provide Blacks with a collective group membership experience, a sense of belonging, and a group consciousness that gave them both spiritual and social support.

### Coping with Racial Microaggressions

As Black males take on the personal and academic challenges that are a part of their college experience, it is important that they be armed with the tools needed to sustain their interests and keep them motivated. The Black religious experience has given many individuals the opportunity to connect them to a Higher Power and to the community they embrace as family. The religious or spiritual experience may provide a motivating epiphany that may inspire some Black males in college to persist and persevere in spite of the academic, social, personal, and environmental factors that may draw them away from their college commitments. It is important for research to be conducted on the role of social groups, birth and extended families, and the inner wellspring of character that gives fuel to persistence and resiliency.

In his research on urban Black youth, Reynolds (1998) explored the role of resilience, defined as “functional competence in the presence of multiple risk factors such as poverty, stress, and low educational attainment” (p. 84). The study identified a number of important attributes evident in young Black males that were good predictors of later



academic performance. Strong support systems (school and community), for example, acted as a shield against social temptations. The role of the family in the development of personal goals and aspirations also contributed to the resilience of these Black males. Although the sample in this study was a group of low-income Black 12-year-olds, and not Black male college students, its design and results provide insight into the way that resilience is realized in educational settings. These findings support research that suggest that Black males who are socially engaged, active in campus activities, and able to negotiate the campus climate are more likely to persist and achieve their defined academic goals ( Brown, 2008; Harper, 2005; Harper & Quaye, 2008; Jenkins, Harburg, Weissberg, & Donnelly, 2004).

Resilience is the ability to recover strength and spirit during or after experiences that result in feelings of intense stress or dissonance. It is the ability to be buoyant; the ability to bounce back. The concept of resilience frequently focuses on personality traits that provide protection against adversity. Optimism has been highlighted in research findings as important to an understanding of resilience (Floyd, 1996). In exploring spirituality, questions related to the elements of hope, or resilience embedded in its teachings, may help to explain its utility as an option and choice for Black males who have attended a community college and are confronted with adversity and racial microaggressions.

Where the pressures and demands of an academic environment may require a steady flow of resilience, it is important to remember that men who are over-stressed, angry, and unable or ill-equipped to manage conflicts are “expected to function within a culture that silences, abuses, and devalues their existence” (Pierre, Mahalik, &

Woodland, 2001, p. 20). Black males who repeatedly encounter racism have increased incidences of hypertension, sleep disturbances, obesity, and substance abuse.

On those campuses where Black males may not feel like part of the fold, the extent to which Black adolescents positively view their cultural group may have significant effects on their coping behaviors and subjective well-being (Constantine, Donnelly, & Myers, 2002, p. 699). Black males in college who have the support of a group fare much better than those who are left to fend on their own. The social support provided by family members, church groups, fraternities, social clubs, and athletic teams can provide Black males on college campuses with a nurturing environment that enhances their likelihood for academic success. These groups and organizations mirror, in many ways, the structures and activities of Black religious organizations.

Evidence suggests “that families lay the groundwork for success long before Black students get to college...the term *family* included extended family like grandparents, aunts, uncles, and fictive kin (neighbors, church members, friends)” (Herndon & Hirt, 2004, p. 505). Group memberships and group affiliations on college campuses for Black males appear to become extensions of previous cultural experiences that encouraged cohesion and bonding. As Harper (2006) pointed out, when Black male students become involved in campus activities and serve in leadership positions in student organizations, they have better experiences and gain more from college than their uninvolved same-race male peers (p. 90). These affiliations may provide these Black students with the spiritual grounding they need to keep them committed and engaged.

The college experience affords many opportunities for students to expand their lives by looking beyond the classroom to other opportunities for personal development.

The support they receive from the groups they encounter inside and outside of the classroom is critical to their development and can directly affect their academic performance. In a study on academic achievement among Black males, Davis (1994) suggests that institutions of higher learning should make a commitment to provide greater integration of Black males into the academic mainstream of college life (p. 631). The alienation that many Black males feel on college campuses is sometimes tempered by involvement in a Black Greek-letter Organization (BGO), an athletic team, or a social or cultural group of same-race peers. With these options, they are able to engage their identity in supportive and positive ways. The associations Black males have with same-race peers may provide them with a self-awareness and validation that is not laced with judgment and criticism. This self-awareness may positively impact their self-esteem and bring meaning to their lives. Meaning and purpose, important elements in defining spirituality, may also enrich the meaning and experience of college for them (Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Harper, 2012).

In their study on Black men at HBCUs, Kimbrough and Harper (2006) found that the importance of having a supportive environment of faculty, administrators and peers cannot be downplayed. Black men on HBCU campuses – much like white men at PWIs – felt potent, empowered, and in charge because they are in an environment with people who look like them and their status as males, in a male-focused culture, is endorsed and applauded (p. 193). Academic achievement may be connected to resilience when Black males receive consistent support from same-race groups that validate who they are. This Black consciousness results in a heightened sense of racial self-esteem, which in turn is a significant predictor of efficacy (D’Apolito, 2000, p.116). Research reveals the

importance of self-esteem and self-efficacy as dimensions of spiritual development for college students (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011).

Mizell (1999) examined the concept of personal mastery in his longitudinal study of 892 Black males. He investigated Black males' ability to "control" their environment. Mizell studied the role of economic status, parental educational attainment, and religious attendance as predictors of personal mastery. He found that lack of religious participation "may rob young African American males of the chance to garner interpersonal resources" (p. 224). Personal mastery was linked to resilience because it addressed the ability to take control of situations and create positive outcomes. It involved personal choice, choice that may be rooted in the religious or spiritual foundation and that is a guiding life force. For Black male college students, this meant finding internal and external resources to help defend them against racism and provide support for educational aspirations. Mizell's (1999) work on personal mastery suggests an understanding of how guiding life philosophies can support the resilience needed to hurdle challenges and strengthen a sense of self, giving fuel to the energy needed to succeed.

Watson (2006) discussed spirituality and Black male college students. He found that religion, in African American culture, subsumed cultural rituals, Western philosophy, African-centered practices, and group consciousness. This suggests that spirituality may be tied to identity, group consciousness, cultural rituals, and religious practice. Verbal acuity, wording skills, and ritualized gestures used by Black males may serve as validation of who they are. Although these gestures may have negative expressions in gang rituals, they also demonstrate positive expressions of group awareness and a commitment to the collective.

The rituals connected to dance and music for Black males can also be understood in both a cultural and religious context. Music can be mesmerizing and “of the spirit.” Dance can be “spirited” and tied into transcendent consciousness where participants appear as if they are in a trance. These rites and rituals have their roots in the cultures of West Africa. Affirmation of Blackness and group identity is realized in the adoption of African names and manners of dress. The adoption of Muslim names, even for those who have not converted to Islam, is viewed as an affirmation of a strong self-defined Black identity. If spirituality can bring meaning and purpose to life, then it may serve a “survival” function and may possibly explain why many Black males are able to find the strength they need to confront racial microaggressions and succeed in college.

### The Utility of Spirituality

Historically, American Blacks transformed Christianity to suit their social and religious needs and provided the support as they sought meaning for their lives and the strength to confront slavery and oppression (Frazier, 1974; Mitchell, 2004). There may be a comparable utility that spirituality and religiosity serve for Black male community college students as they engage in the college experience.

The statistics on the retention, persistence, achievement, and completion rates for Black male college students indicate a need for research on the factors that produced these outcomes and an identification of possible actions that may produce more positive outcomes. (Harper, 2005; Harper, 2006; Suarez-Balcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo et al., 2003; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Yet, in spite of the odds, there are many Black males who attend college and succeed. There is value in studying the principles

that guide successful behavior and contribute to resilience, including an examination of criteria that provide motivation. These principles may have a distinctive caste as Blacks experience a world filled with challenges related to race. Sedlacek (1974) questioned the existence of a Black experience.. Resnicow and Ross-Gaddy (1997), Asante (1980; 1987), Ani (1994), and Mazama (2001) discussed the existence and experience of Afrocentricity, a psychological construct that stresses the importance of spirituality. Afrocentricity may explain how Black male college students construct meaning for their lives and the role of spirituality.

For African Americans, religion provides support and serves to mitigate the life stresses that challenge stability (Smith, Fabricatore, and Peyrot, 1999; Bryant and Astin, 2008). The literature reviewed here revealed an awareness that, in academia, African Americans can expect to encounter some form of racism, covert or overt, on the college campuses where they are enrolled (Hurtado, 1992; Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000). Given this likelihood, an examination of the choices Black students make when confronted with racism and racial microaggressions at community college, and the behaviors they exhibit in response to these acts, prompts a question on whether spirituality or a religious orientation influences their decisions.

Spirituality (as depicted in Figure 4) is faith rooted in a life purpose that embraces others and a Higher Being. Spiritually encompasses more than religion (Delgado, 2005; Tanyi, 2002; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Chatters, 1994). Spirituality may provide individuals with the strength they need to transcend pain and suffering (Tanyi, 2002).

The Black church in America is a powerful community institution that has served a religious, social, and political function (Frazier, 1974; Mitchell, 2004; Lincoln, 1963). I

posit that the nurturance provided by the Black church is mirrored in the social, academic, and cultural groups Black male college students become associated with while enrolled in college. These family-like structures may provide the support and encouragement Black males need to succeed. The sense of community fostered by groups needs to be identified and understood.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Given the role of spirituality and religion as an integral component of Black American life and culture, this research was conducted to gain an understanding of how spirituality was constructed by Black males who attended community colleges, and how it shaped their response when a racial microaggression incident occurred. What were their responses to a racial microaggression? How did these microaggressions, which occurred on the community college campus, impact their lives? This qualitative research studied the responses of 15 Black males who had attended a community college to determine if, and how, their spirituality influenced their responses to racial microaggressions. The data revealed that spirituality may have provided them with the compassion, forgiveness, resilience, and inner strength needed to continue in their efforts to be academically successful.

Mixed methods were used in the design of this research. A qualitative approach “based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem” combined with the quantitative results from a survey on spirituality and religion were used. (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Qualitative investigation has been used to describe the unfolding of social processes by examining the context in which they occur as articulated by the participants (Van Maanen, 1983). The recorded experiences of the



Black males shed light on the strategies that contributed to their persistence and success at community colleges. (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001).

The complexities of the problems and issues studied benefitted from using both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell, 2009). In order to identify potential study participants, the AMOS (Armstrong Measure of Spirituality) was given to determine the participants' level of spirituality. This quantitative instrument, when scored, provided the upper level high scorers who were later invited to participate in the interviews. The methodological approach for collecting the majority of research data was phenomenological (more descriptive than explanatory) and throughout this study "the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon" is described (Creswell, 1998, p. 51; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Descriptions of the experiences, reported by the participants, provided the primary focus for this research. Their descriptions provided the keys to understanding how they experienced racial microaggressions and spirituality.

Rooted in the work of Edmund Husserl (1927), mathematician and philosopher, phenomenology has as its task the systematic examination of the significance that individuals' place on their experiences. Husserl devised this notion of intentionality as a guide to understanding how individuals interpret experiences and their awareness of their life's realities (McCall, 1983). His focus on the interpretation of lived experiences contributed to the body of literature in phenomenological psychology that targets lived experiences as the basis for understanding human life (McCall, 1983; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology assumes that we can only know what we experience through conscious awareness and sensory experience (Husserl, 1927). It allows for naturalistic inquiry and

interpretation (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975) that can unveil the common themes that are shared and understood by a group. Its value lies in its ability to record the experiences of individuals, and to place them within categories that allow the researcher to identify the themes that are common to members of the group. By critically examining participants' stories and the descriptions of their experiences, the researcher gained a richer and more thorough understanding of the significance of their personal experiences (Van Manen, 1984).

The phenomenological approach to this research allowed the participants to identify their lived experiences with racial microaggressions, which they countered with personal spiritual commitments. The patterns evident in their responses produced meanings on their experiences (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). The research methodology also used some elements of narrative inquiry. A form of qualitative research, the component of narrative inquiry involved recording the stories from the lives of study participants (Creswell, 2009).

Since spirituality and racial microaggressions are experienced differently by different people, open-ended interviews allowed the researcher to gain information on the context in which each experience occurred. This approach to developing the context was based upon the participants' descriptions and impressions of what occurred, and it provided an opportunity to gain a broader and deeper understanding of the experience. The depth of understanding afforded by the interviews allowed for a more engaged and thorough exploration and understanding.

## Conceptual Framework

The response choices available to Black males who encounter racial microaggressions while at a community college will be understood through the frameworks of racial microaggressions and spirituality. As discussed earlier, spirituality has at its foundation a belief in God/a Higher Power however labeled or defined; a connection to others that is realized through an understanding of God/Allah; an ability to move beyond and transcend “self”; and a strong commitment to a life purpose. The data will be developed from interviews with Black males who attended a community college concerning their encounters with racial microaggressions. The analysis will look for emerging themes linked to spirituality. These might include non-violence, compassion, forgiveness, resilience, perseverance, and empathy.

The potential for completion and success for a Black male community college student may be threatened if they choose an unacceptable or illegal response to racial microaggressions. Without spirituality or some kind of coping strategy, a Black male could choose a response that entangles him in a legal matter or one that goes against the behavior policies of the college he attends. Given the unpredictability of when and where a racial microaggression might occur, there are no accurate predictors of what choices Black male community college students might be making.

The actions they choose as a response can impact their status in college. Internalization of the effects of racial microaggressions could lead to depression and apathy. Externalization could lead to retaliatory acts of aggression or violence. In the conceptual construction of their response choices as constructed in Sue’s Microaggression Process Model (see Figure 3), though spirituality is not mentioned, it

may have some utility for mitigating the effects of acts of racism. In the Microaggression Process Model there are five domains or phases (Sue, 2010). In the first phase there is some experienced event or situation; in phase two perception occurs; in phase three the participant reacts with a cognitive, behavioral or emotional response; in phase four the participant interprets the situation and responds; and in phase five the consequences for the individual are examined.

Common messages in racial microaggressions:

- Ascription of intellectual inferiority
- Second-class citizenship
- Assumption of criminality
- Assumption of inferior status
- Assumed universality of the Black experience, and
- Assumed superiority of white cultural values/communication styles (Sue, Nadal et al., 2008).

These are some of the themes evident in the microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations that are the foundation of racial microaggressions.

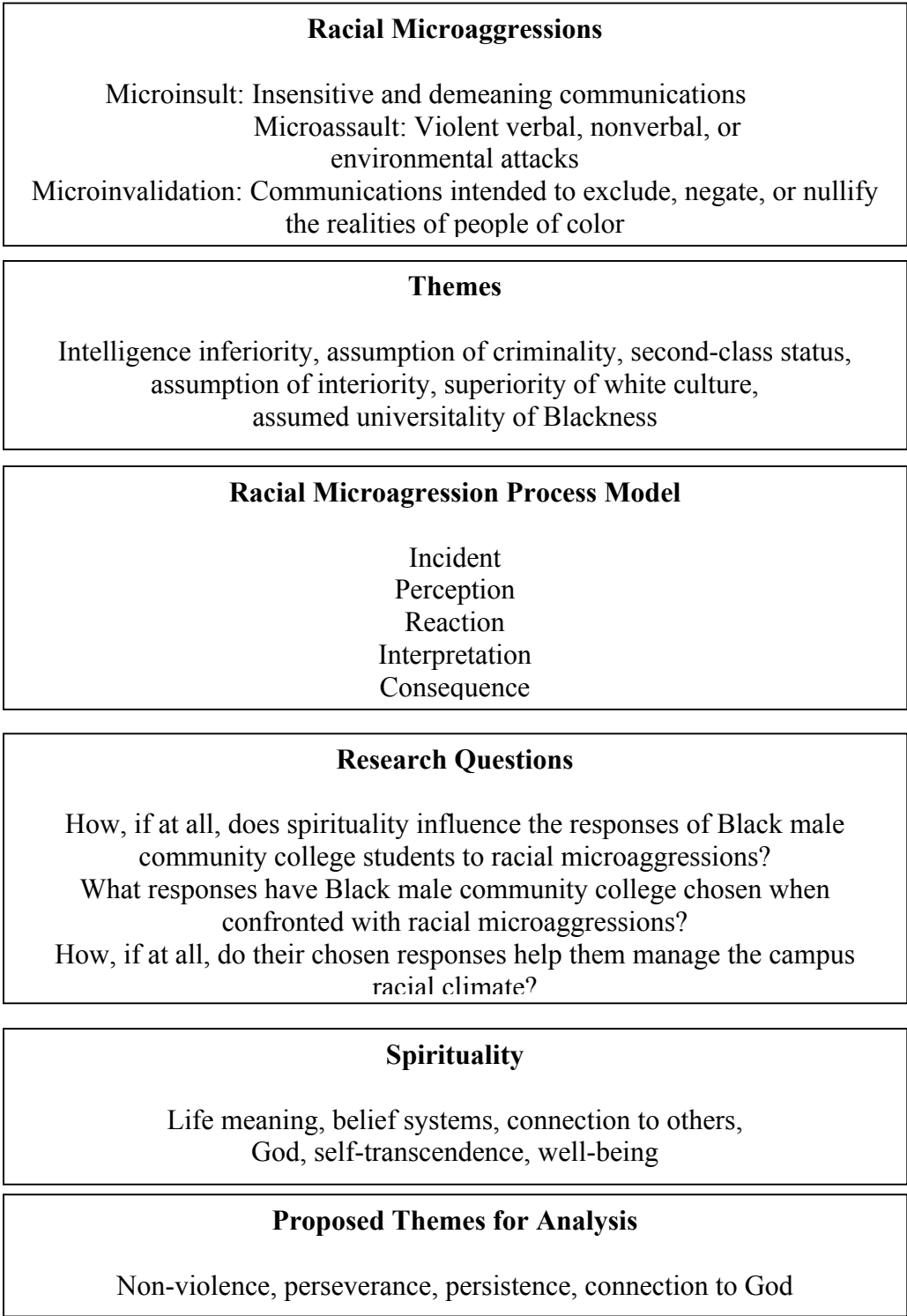


Figure 5. Conceptual Framework.

## Instrumentation: The Armstrong Measure of Spirituality (AMOS)

The Armstrong Measure of Spirituality (AMOS) (see Appendix A) was developed after a pilot study of 318 undergraduate psychology students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It sought to incorporate a more inclusive understanding of religiosity and spirituality, one that would take into account cultural differences, concerns about self-esteem and mental health, and moral judgment (Armstrong, 1996, p. 107). For example, there are many different interpretations of what it means to be religious or spiritual. A credible assessment instrument was needed to identify and classify these interpretations. Though the AMOS was developed for use with an African American population, it considers a broad range of religious experiences, that can be used with any religious or spiritual orientation. It has been previously used in research on religion and spirituality (Armstrong, 1996).

The four main goals of the AMOS (Armstrong Measure of Spirituality) instrument are to:

1. Show the multidimensionality of spirituality,
2. Show the influence of a person's relationship with God or his relationship with others,
3. Explain the associations among the different dimensions of spirituality: attitudes, behavior, and experiences, and
4. Acknowledge cultural differences and how individuals and groups experience their relationship with God (Jones, 1996; Armstrong, 1994).

The AMOS uses a 5-item Likert scale with ratings from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." There are four subscales (spiritual beliefs, spiritual actions, spiritual characteristics, and religious experience). Spiritual beliefs measures beliefs held by the

respondent (such as, “I worry a lot”). Spiritual actions measures attitudes toward the treatment of others (for example, “It is important to help others in need”). Spiritual characteristics measurements correlate positively for self-esteem and psychological adjustment and negatively for depression (for example, “Knowing that God supports me helps me feel secure”). Religious experience measurements focus on the mental health of the respondent as evidenced by the expected correlation between several of the four AMOS subscales (for example, “I do not believe in miracles”). Spiritual beliefs and spiritual characteristics each have twenty items on the instrument. These two subscales alone are deemed relevant enough for use on measuring spirituality since they look at beliefs and characteristics while the other subscales provide measurements of correlation with all four subscales (Jones, 1996).

The AMOS was designed to develop an operational definition of spirituality (Jones, 1996). The results used in this research defined the level of spirituality for study participants. This was done by identifying whether or not the participant believed he was connected to a Higher Power who influenced how he lived his life. AMOS takes into account individuals who endorse an organized religion as well as those who do not, thus encompassing those who are either spiritual or religious (Armstrong, 1996). The AMOS “is based on conceptualizations of spirituality drawn from psychological and religious literature, both academic and popular” (Armstrong, 1996, p. 108).

The AMOS was chosen for this research because of its reliability. Spirituality and religiosity were identified through responses to the items on the AMOS subscales, which are used to determine whether there is a demonstrated action that informs a commitment to spirituality or religiosity as a guiding life force. The AMOS measures responses on

four subscales: spiritual beliefs, spiritual characteristics, spiritual actions, and religious experiences. These subscales provide the foundation for the AMOS instrument because they effectively capture the interrelationships that show strength in spirituality. The subscales are the key identifiers of spirituality

The effective and commonly used reliability statistic, Cronbach's alpha, determines the internal consistency or average correlation of items used in surveys to gauge reliability (Santos, 1999). Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients ranged from .81 for Spiritual Actions to .97 for Spiritual Beliefs. Correlations among the four subscales were low to moderate and ranged from .18 (Religious Experiences and Spiritual Actions) to .57 (Religious Experiences and Spiritual Beliefs) (Armstrong, 1996). These findings provided evidence that the instrument was able to capture distinctive components of spirituality (Armstrong 1996, p. 110).

#### Study Location and Setting

The subjects were Black males who attended one of three public urban-suburban multi-campus community colleges (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2010) that enrolled a large population of students of color. Over 100 men were interviewed and nearly 60 took the AMOS. The study participants lived in a metropolitan area where 25.3% of the 595,000 residents in the urban center self-reported as Black; roughly 52,000 Black males of all ages resided in this urban center (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). The pseudonyms used as identifiers for the three community colleges were the names of three major cities in Ghana, West Africa.

Accra Community College has a main campus, a second smaller campus less than four miles from the main campus, and four satellite campuses. It is accessible by public transportation and is identified as the eighth largest college in the metropolitan



area. It offers both associate degree and certificate programs, and it is the most diverse public institution of higher learning in this region.

Kumasi Community College has the largest percentage of Black students enrolled in a community college in this region. Its main campus is located in the inner-city Black community that serves more than 50 different churches and mosques representing more than 15 different religious orientations. This college is easily accessible by public transportation, and offers both associate degree and certificate programs. Distance learning and online courses are offered to meet the demands of a growing and diverse student population.

Cape Coast Community College is located outside of the city proper, but is accessible by public subway, bus, or rail. Over the past five years, it experienced a steady increase in the number of enrolled students of color.. The majority of its students attend part-time. Though the majority of its students come from the urban center, it draws a large percentage of its students from the surrounding suburbs..

### Study Participants

Black males who reside in this metropolitan area and attended one of the three community colleges (graduated from, transferred out, or dropped out) were considered potential study participants. It was expected that since Accra Community College is the largest community college in this region, the pool of potential study participants from this college would be larger. Accra Community College had the largest representation in the study pool. Its student population is more than four times that of Kumasi Community College and nearly twice that of Cape Coast Community College. Some potential study participants had attended more than one community college in this.

## The Selection of Study Participants

Study participants were recruited at churches, mosques, community centers, barber shops, neighborhood stores, community health centers, restaurants and social spots, and public subway stations. Printed flyers were distributed (Appendix B) to potential study participants at these sites. Flyers were also mailed to an alliance group with a nearly fifty-year history of offering services to over a hundred CBOs (community-based organizations) and FBOs (faith-based organizations) in the greater Black community. The flyers included email and phone contact information, so that potential participants could contact the researcher and provide email addresses and phone numbers where they could be contacted. Given the population of Blacks in this metropolitan area, the pool of potential applicants was large. The researcher paid four assistants to distribute flyers at the specific locations. Two thousand flyers were initially printed and distributed. Emails were sent to the deans of students, directors of student activities, and sports coaches of all the local colleges and universities that attract Black males who may have had a community college experience. Anyone contacted had the opportunity to be briefed on the study. Follow-up emails were sent to these groups to maximize interest and participation.

A two-stage process was used in the data collection for this research. In stage one, all Black males who showed an interest in participating were contacted and randomly assigned a subject number, interviewed (Appendix C), and invited to take the Armstrong Measure of Spirituality (AMOS) at the specified campus office location. The president of the urban community college with the largest percentage of Black students gave approval for the researcher to use a private office on campus. It was used during the interview sessions and study materials were locked and secured in this office. Two assistants were paid to proctor the administration of the AMOS. The assistants were briefed on the purpose of the study and given confidentiality guidelines to follow (Appendix D). This

process took place over three days from 9:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. Scheduling times were sufficiently flexible to accommodate all who were interested. As an incentive, all participants were given a gift bag filled with healthy snacks, paid for by the researcher. Prior to distributing the gift bags, potential participants were asked if they have any food allergies. Snack substitutions were provided for these participants.

The researcher conducted the initial interviews immediately before the administration of the AMOS, which took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The initial interview was used to identify Black males who experienced a racial microaggression while attending a community college. A positive response to the questions on racial microaggressions and the scores on the AMOS determined suitability for participation in the comprehensive interview. The initial interviews and the Armstrong Measure of Spirituality (AMOS) were critical to the results. The AMOS was the primary measurement tool used to identify the level of spirituality of the former community college students.

In stage two, the top 20 highest scorers on the AMOS who had also experienced a racial microaggression while at a community college, were invited to participate in the comprehensive interview. Although only 15 participants were ultimately interviewed, 20 potential participants had been identified in case a replacement was needed.

#### The Comprehensive Interviews

The 15 Black males who scored the highest on the AMOS and experienced racial microaggressions while at a community college participated in comprehensive, one-on-one interviews. Only 15 Black males were interviewed, because, as noted by Miles & Huberman (1994), “a study with more than 15 cases can become unwieldy.” Qualitative

researchers believe that theoretical saturation is reached with around 15 interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Lee, 1999).

Data used in this study came from the comprehensive interviews, which took place over a three-day period in an office at the community college identified for this purpose. Only the participant and the researcher used this office. Study materials (tape recorders, journals, research notes, and interview materials) were kept in this room and locked in a tamper-proof file cabinet. The office door was locked and secured when it was not being used for interviews. The same interview protocol was used for each participant. (Appendix E). The researcher had the freedom and flexibility to expand on the questions by using probes (Patton, 1990). Open-ended questions allowed for more detailed input from the participants, yielding more data for analysis.

To maintain the confidentiality of those participating in the comprehensive interviews, each person pulled, from a large bowl, a piece of paper on which the name of a famous Black male author was written. Each study participant is identified in this dissertation with the name drawn from the bowl. (Appendix F). This name was used when organizing data to be included in the analysis. At the completion of the study, any information that might possibly have been used to connect the participant with interview responses was shredded and destroyed.

### Data Collection

As an incentive, each person selected to participate in the comprehensive interview received a \$20.00 gift card for a local restaurant chain. I paid for the gift cards and distributed them as an expression of appreciation.

Consent and release forms were signed before each interview began (Appendix G). At any time a participant had the opportunity to terminate the interview, as well as

to not. He could also choose not to answer a question. According to Kvale (1996), interviews are conversations with subjects that are designed to give researchers access to the life of the interviewee. With an open-ended format, study participants were allowed to respond to questions, with few restrictions on the length of time, so that they could provide detailed answers. Kvale (1996) stated that although the interview is intended to be objective this is often difficult to achieve, given the subjectivity of the research. Therefore, it was important to be flexible in the time allotted for each interview. The comprehensive interviews were designed to last an hour, but not to exceed 90 minutes.

A standard open-ended interview format, guided the exchange between each participant and the researcher. The interview protocol was printed and available for study participants to review. In addition, a poster with information on microaggressions was placed so that each participant could review the information during the interview. (Appendix H). It included descriptions of microaggressions, and defined and highlighted examples of microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations to assist the study participants in identifying and naming a phenomenon they may have experienced. Interviews were recorded, and a sensitive digital recording device (Olympus WS-700M digital recorder) was used so that transcriptions could be electronically produced. At any time during the interview, the study participant was able to request that the recorder be turned off.

This researcher recognized that the quality of recorded information is important to its analysis. Responses to interview questions needed to be clear if the transcription was to be accurate. Any differences in dialect prompted the review of the interview by an outside, professionally-trained transcriber to check for clarity and accuracy. This transcriber was trained to detect and clarify language subtleties that may not be detected on a written transcription (e.g., urban street expressions, muted and nuanced slang, verbal styles, or language laced with special vernacular). These safeguards reduced the

likelihood of transcription error. Basit (2003) suggested that because “data analysis is the most difficult and most crucial aspect of qualitative research,” researchers should consider using computer programs to assist them in the transcription (p. 143). The computer software (NVivo) designed for analyzing qualitative data was used in transcribing and organizing the data for analysis.

During the interview, I took notes in a journal to record descriptive information and reflective observations used in the analysis. I used this technique to document what learning, hunches, and feelings occurred as a result of this experience (Creswell, 1998, p. 125). I found that the “swagger” and physical style of some of the participants gave me insight into their sense of self and confidence. The way they greeted me also provided me with information for hunches I might have about how they are as individuals. Many shared what they were learning about life from their experiences and I found this to be most valuable. Physical and behavioral cues provided insights on what the participant was experiencing when he responded to a given question. These cues came as squirming, gestures to the head or face, quiet times of reflection, or the clenching of fists or teeth. These indicators of a physical response to an internal or mental stimulus (i.e., an experience of a racial microaggression) in some cases provided additional data for the analysis.

I was open to receiving any information shared by study participants that related to the interview questions, but sidelined biases and preconceptions. According to Kvale, researchers who take time to review mentally the interview protocol and the purpose of their research, mindful of their own life experiences and how they may influence the interview, will be more able to go into the interview unburdened by expectations tied into their preconceptions and biases (1996).

At the completion of the interviews, as a safeguard, information was provided participants on the s the names of local Black psychiatrists and psychologists and

Licensed Clinical Social Workers whose practices focused on serving Black males. Community health centers were identified that could provide participants with some assistance if they experienced unfavorable or disturbing reactions to recalling or reliving a racial microaggression they had experienced. As a professionally trained counselor-therapist, I was able to identify indicators that would alert me to a problem. Providing participants with a list of resources is an intervention strategy and safeguard that fosters support and protection (Kaufman, 2003). I did not observe or encounter any subject who showed discomfort or an unfavorable reaction. On the contrary, most were eager to share their experiences with me.

After the interviews were transcribed, study participants received an email or phone call inviting them to meet with me to review their responses should this be of interest. They also were able at that time to modify or delete any item or items they did not want included. Four of the study participants responded, requesting social time to further discuss many of the issues that came up during the interviews. Three requested a meeting after the research is published to discuss findings and to go into more detail about how racial microaggressions continue to impact their lives.

#### Theoretical Foundation and Interview Protocol

The protocol used in the initial interview, which was conducted prior to the administration of the AMOS, allowed a connection to be made between the research findings and the theories of racial microaggressions and spirituality. The primary reason for this interview was to determine if an individual had experienced a microaggression incident. The comprehensive interview protocol allowed for a more extensive analysis of racial microaggressions because participants were given the opportunity to elaborate on what they experienced, how they felt, and how they reacted. Protocol questions on

spirituality provided the opportunity to collect information on its importance in their lives as the participant explained how he used spirituality to counter racial microaggressions. These elements provided the foundation for the analysis of the research data.

The interview protocol was designed to elicit responses from study participants that provided data needed to answer the primary and secondary research questions:

- Primary: How, if at all, does spirituality influence the responses of Black males who have attended a community college to racial microaggressions?
- Secondary: What responses have Black males who attended a community college chosen when confronted with racial microaggressions?
- Secondary: How do Black males who have attended a community college experience their spirituality when confronted with racial microaggressions?

The protocols were designed to incorporate material from Critical Race Theory, theories and concepts related to racial microaggressions, and elements of spirituality. Participant responses were analyzed through the lens of theories that guided this research. The themes that emerged provided a link between the dimensions of spirituality and the processing of microaggressions.

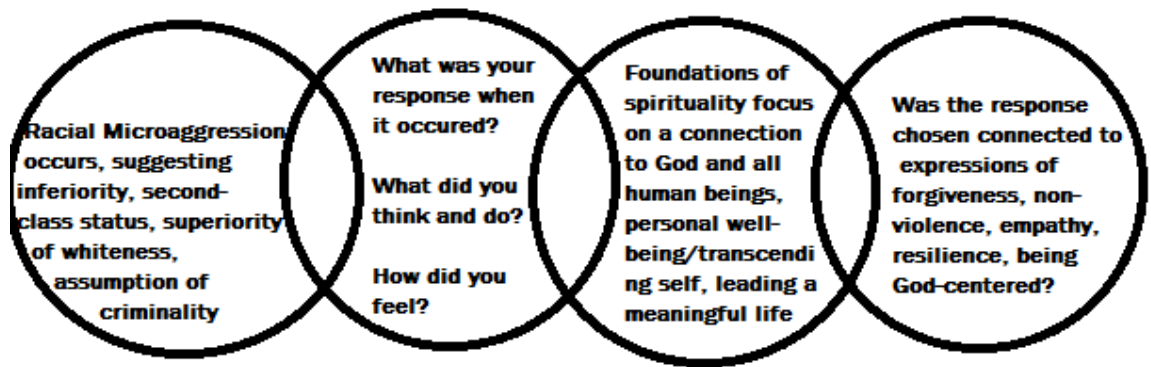
### Data Analysis

Data analysis focused on the meaning that the study participants gave to their experiences. In studying how Black males who attended community colleges responded to racism they experienced on campus the participants' experiences were summarized in appropriate detail. To describe these experiences, I needed to (1) learn how they were



was translated and defined by the participant, (2) determine whether the experiences could be related to broader racial concepts, (3) understand the meaning which the participant gave to the experience, and (4) combine all information to provide an inclusive description of the experience. These steps paralleled the data analysis process used by von Eckartsberg and highlighted by Moustakas (1994).

The protocol included items that allowed the participants to consider all responses that may have been used when responding to racial microaggressions. Given the nature and history of race relations in America, racial encounters are delicate matters (Kitano, 1985) The social construction of Black males, along with the public perception of their identity, has contributed to the seeming acceptance of the negative stereotypes that define them as a monolithic group (Sue, 2010; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). There were many response options the Black males might have used when they faced racial microaggression; some could have chosen to react in violent retaliation and others might have retreated from the location without any engagement. In analyzing the choices they made, study participants were given the opportunity to describe the meaning they assigned to racism, how it influenced their life in the specific situations, and how their spirituality directly informed their choices. The value of the interviews was revealed when participants described what they thought, felt, and did when they encountered a racial microaggression. This process is diagramed in figure 6: Framework for Data Analysis.



*Figure 6.* Framework for data analysis.

The words and phrases used by the participants in their responses to questions guided the analysis. Descriptions and details used by more than one participant are highlighted in the analysis, and used to identify key concepts in the microaggression process, as outlined by Sue (2010), and concepts of spirituality.

In the tradition of Husserl and his contemporaries, the focus of phenomenological analysis in this study was on “*verstehen*: the interpretive understanding of human interaction” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 23). By allowing study subjects to interpret their experiences as microaggressions, I gained access to the conceptual framework they used in constructing their reality (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The participants described and defined what they experienced. Their perception of this experience became the foundation for the construction of their world. The descriptions of racial microaggressions and the utility of spirituality in warding off its deleterious impact were enriched by an expanded understanding of how each study participant saw the phenomenon. This understanding gave insight into how the participants framed racial microaggressions in their mind and how they managed them mentally. This approach to investigating the meaning of the experience as well as the reaction to the experience

enabled this researcher to identify where participants placed specific racial acts in their social world and how race was understood within their spiritual realm.

In conducting the analysis, interview data were categorized into specific clusters that identified specific racial experiences. The groupings were identified by common themes described by participants and were used to describe the relationship between the racial experience and how spirituality influenced the reaction to the experience. Particular attention was paid to developing an understanding of how the phenomenon or experience influenced resilience, persistence, choices and responses, and the utility of spirituality in interpreting and reacting to the experience.

The data were analyzed using a five-step approach that involved condensing, categorizing, structuring the narrative, interpreting the meaning, and generating meaning (Kvale, 1996). During the interview, prompts were used to probe and clarify information. In conducting the analysis, patterns and themes were identified and connections were made between responses to racial microaggressions and the utility of spirituality (Moustakas, 1994).

All of the subtleties and nuances used in describing the experiences that were related to racial microaggressions and spirituality were highlighted in the analysis to capture social interactions and motivations (Ponterotto, 2006). The power of what is not said was important to this research since it was a response to the context. For example, during some interviews, if the study participant rolled his or showed discomfort, it was an opportunity to probe more deeply to uncover the cause of the discomfort. In most cases, this yielded rich data.

#### Storytelling

Critical Race Theory (CRT) welcomes the discourse on race and encourages research that connects stories to concepts. It fosters an understanding of the impact and importance of race in cultural and social contexts. Storytelling provides a historical,

cultural, and social perspective that is lost or buried in the conclusions drawn about race from most other methods of inquiry (Bell, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Critical Race theorists have been criticized for their use of storytelling as privileging the voices of people of color. This gives rise to questions about how evidence is assessed and truths are claimed (Duncan, 2005). CRT, however, uses storytelling as a device for deepening understandings of the experiences of individuals. Participants were encouraged to give detailed accounts of their experiences with racial microaggressions and how their spirituality served them. These individual accounts or stories are described in the following chapters to augment the research findings.

Students of color have been assertive in telling lived experience stories. The University of Colorado Students of Color publication *Making a Difference: University Students of Color Speak Out* (2002) is but one example. Their approach to storytelling and to publishing their stories has been replicated on several university campuses. The voices of these students of color have provided insight into the racial challenges they faced as college students.

A person's account of an incident may be told as a series of disconnected facts and emotions. While some participants' accounts were told as a story with clearly defined actors and descriptions of what was said and how they felt, others pulled the strands together at the end. These accounts were sometimes very detailed in their presentation of everything that happened, yet the story could also be told through the silences interspersed within the details. Some started out wildly unrealistically, while others stuttered and stopped. Each account had its own rhythm and pace. Thus the descriptive data granted rich insights.

## Interviewer Effects

In public opinion polling and research interviews, the interviewer's race may affect the responses of study participants (Weeks & Moore, 1981; Davis, 1997; Davis & Silver, 2003). Social class disparities, religion, and gender can also produce biases in responses (Dohrenwend, Colombotos, & Dohrenwend, 1968).

The subjects for this research were Black males who had attended community colleges. The researcher was also a Black male. Studies on interviewer effect have documented respondents' sensitivities to questions involving race. Where interviewers and respondents are of the same race, there is an increased likelihood that respondents will be truthful when discussing issues of race (Davis & Silver, 2003).

## Discrepant Data

The analysis of data revealed patterns that blended with the theoretical foundation that guided the study; discrepant data were also addressed (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Tuba, 1985; Mays & Pope, 2000; Patton, 1999) For example, if a respondent related that he, that he did not see himself or anyone who resembled him in a video shown in class, this account would have been classified in Sue's taxonomy as a racial microinvalidation. Not all responses, however, fit so easily into the theoretical structure. In Sue's taxonomy (2010), racial microaggressions take the form of microinsults (insensitive and demeaning communications), microinvalidations (communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the realities of people of color), or microassaults (violent verbal or nonverbal attacks intended to harm). The evaluation process revealed data that did not fit into the theoretical structure.

In this study on Black males who attended community colleges, I was prepared to encounter Black males who chose to act aggressively when confronted with microinsults, microinvalidations, or microassaults. If this had been a persistent pattern with a number

of respondents, this emerging pattern would need to be explained. As data for this study were evaluated, a periodic review of emerging patterns was done and there were no patterns that did not fit.

### Ethical Concerns and Research Credibility

Checks and balances were incorporated into the research design to ensure credibility. Steps that fostered trustworthiness were taken to reinforce objectivity, including triangulation, analysis of material by peers, and member checks (Ely, Annul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spears, 2002).

### Triangulation

Simply stated, triangulation is the use of a combination of methodologies to study the same phenomenon (Jick, 1979; Seale, 1999). It ensures that any variation in the results of a particular study is not attributable to bias in the research method used. In this study all of the Black males who attended community colleges and showed an interest in this research were briefly interviewed and given the AMOS. The interview included questions on their experiences with racial microaggressions while a community college student. For those Black males who were invited to participate in the comprehensive interview, the data collected at that time was compared with the data obtained in the initial interview. A strong or important theme and meaning derived from their responses in the initial interviews that converges with the data collected from the comprehensive interviews indicated a logical pattern that strengthened the interpretation of the data gathered. Notes taken during the initial interview were compared with data collected in the comprehensive interview and there was a pattern of consistency with both responses and reactions to racial microaggressions.

## Research Review Team

In seeking truth in research inquiry, “authenticity” addresses concerns about the interview protocol and whether it is likely to elicit the data needed to address the research questions; a research review team, sometimes referred to as peer reviewers can be used to ask the hard questions and serve as external evaluators of the research process (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006). In order to address the issue of authenticity in this study, six professionals comprised the research review team. A demographic description of this group appears in the appendix (Appendix J). They were asked to review the responses from all Black males who participated in the comprehensive interview and my analysis of their comments. Members of this team were credentialed, experienced educators in areas directly related to this research topic. Collectively they represented a broad range of educational, cultural, and life experiences. Five of the six worked in higher education: a community college dean, two college professors, a college librarian-researcher, and a scholar-researcher who has consulted nationwide and published widely on issues focused on the learning process and student success. The sixth person was a former high school history department chairperson, at the time of the study he was the acting high school principal at a school located in an urban area with a Black/Latino enrollment of 95 percent. There were five males and one female. They were diverse racially. Three of the six grew up in urban environments and attended elite, private colleges and universities. All six reviewers held college degrees at a Masters level or above, and two of the six had published extensively. Two of the six had over forty years of combined experience in research in higher education and behavioral science. All of the reviewers had an opportunity to review the interview protocol and provide input. They reconvened after the interviews were completed and transcribed. This provided the opportunity for them

to examine data and share any thoughts and ideas about what the questions and responses revealed.

The use of research review teams in qualitative inquiry is an established validity strategy that challenges the researcher to consider and respond to the difficult questions that must be asked prior to, during, and after the data collection and analysis processes (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

### Member Checks

In order to improve the accuracy and credibility of qualitative research, feedback from study participants was encouraged at different stages in the research process. Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview, providing changes and clarifications where needed. They were also contacted and offered the opportunity to review and comment on my summary and analysis of all interviews. These checks gave study participants an opportunity to judge the accuracy of their contributions. This technique is deemed critical for establishing credibility (Creswell, 1998).

One major advantage of member checking is that it gives the participant a chance to review what was said and documented; it allows for summarizing data. A disadvantage might be the drain on the respondent's time. Member checking can strengthen data analysis in qualitative research by being a supportive method for assessing truth and decreasing the likelihood of errors in reporting responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Barbour, 2001).

### Limitations of This Study

This study offers many possibilities for future research in this field. It has defined Black males as those who self-identify as a Black male. This definition ignores the



richness of the many cultures that form the Black Diaspora, but was used because census and demographic data do not disaggregate Black males. This definition was also used because this research is not focused on comparisons or cross cultural analyses. Further research in this area might disaggregate Black males and define their cultural and ethnic affiliations, thus allowing for an examination of the influence of culture on responses to our understanding of racial microaggressions. Many of the nuances and subtleties that are determined by culture may be lost in analyses where groups are not disaggregated for study. The findings of this study, therefore, may not be able to be generalized to all Black male populations.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Black males who attend a community college are likely to encounter racial microaggressions as they progress toward degree attainment or completion of a certificate program (Sue & Constantine, 2007; Davis, 1994; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hall, 2001). The responses they choose when they encounter these microaggressions can impact their status at the college and may put into jeopardy any personal or career plans they might have. This research explored how Black males who attended a community college responded to racial microaggressions and acts of racism. An understanding of the utility of spirituality in the lives of Black Americans in general, and these men specifically, is important to understanding their responses. The findings of this research reveal both the temporary and lasting effects racial microaggressions can have on Black males.

Racial microaggressions and spirituality are the core theoretical concepts that guide the analysis of the data gathered for this study. These theoretical concepts provide a way to categorize and explain racial microaggressions and their intent while exploring the responses to them. Racial microaggressions experienced by Black males who attended a community college were identified and their responses to these microaggressions were recorded using the foundations of spirituality to guide our understanding of life meaning, a connection to God and others, a strong belief system rooted in faith, and an awareness of personal well-being and self-transcendence.

The primary research question that guides this study focuses on whether spirituality influences the responses of Black males to racial microaggressions. This chapter will provide an overview of the study participants selected for this research and the community colleges they attended. Included in this chapter is a section of profiles of eight of the study participants. These eight were selected from the pool of fifteen because they are representative of the group, with an age range, cultural diversity, and range of experiences that reflect the study pool who attended the three community colleges identified in this research. The profiles of this group of eight provide a snapshot into the lives of Black men who attended a community college and experienced racial microaggressions. Each profile provides background information on each person, the colleges they attended, career goals and aspirations, how they construct spirituality and its function in their lives, and accounts of racial microaggressions they experienced while attending a community college.

Chapter 5 documents the racial microaggressions reported by all study participants, reports their responses to these acts, and provides an in-depth analysis of the data. The references to the religious strictures and moral codes connected to the personal definitions of spirituality for the study participants included in the profiles is provided to give insight into how spirituality can provide moral grounding for those men, especially when confronted with stress and challenges.

### The Study Participants

The study participants shared common reactions to the racial microaggressions they encountered. Mindful of their purpose for attending college and their academic

goals, they chose strategies and reactions that would not jeopardize their status as students. Many reacted with decorum and grace, mindful of the spirituality that guides them when they encounter negativity, challenge, or confrontation. The daily insults, put-downs, confronting behaviors, and other microaggressive acts that the study participants encountered during their time at the community college are rooted in society's beliefs and stereotypes about Black males. These microaggressions are best understood in this context. The study participants responded to the microaggressions in a manner that reflects Sue's Racial Microaggression Process Model (2010) as outlined in Chapter 2. They were able to process the incidents and choose a reaction that would protect them from any further victimization that might occur should they respond with anger or violence.

The fifteen participants selected for study in this research met the criteria outlined for participation. Each attended one of the three community colleges that serves the large metropolitan area identified and is accessible by public transportation; each experienced a racial microaggression while at this community college; and each was among the highest combined scorers on the Armstrong Measure of Spirituality (AMOS) instrument. This instrument operationalizes spirituality and religiosity by looking at the key concepts in these constructs, identified as subscales (spiritual beliefs, spiritual characteristics, spiritual actions, and religious experiences), and assessing their interrelationships (Armstrong, 1996). All items on the AMOS were used and scored for each participant.

Each of the subscales mentioned above had a total possible score of 295 (spiritual beliefs—100; spiritual characteristics—100; spiritual actions—50; and religious experiences—45) that could provide insight into the strength of each subscale for each individual assessed. For the purposes of this research, subjects who had the highest

combined score across the subscales were put into the selection pool. Of the fifteen subjects selected for this research, the lowest combined score was 275 and the highest was 293, out of a total possible of 295. All fifteen participants had scores in the spiritual beliefs and spiritual characteristics subscales that were nearly 100. The strength of these two subscales was important because they measure spiritual beliefs and spiritual characteristics as being the most salient indicators of spirituality, suggesting that spirituality does not need to be measured by church attendance, church membership, or public displays of a religious commitment.

There was a wide gap in the scores of those who were selected for participation in this research and those who were not. Many of the men who met the other criteria for participation (attendance at one of the community colleges under study and the experience of a racial microaggression while at a community college) scored in the 190s or the low 200s on the AMOS and were not eligible for participation since only the highest scorers, who also met the other criteria, were included.

Eleven of the fifteen participants were born in the United States. Of the four born outside of the United States, one was born in St. Kitts, one was born in Barbados, one was born in Haiti, and one was born in Ghana (West Africa). Nine attended at least two of the three community colleges selected for study on some occasion in the past, and six attended only Accra Community College. As stated earlier, since Accra Community College is the largest community college in this study and in this targeted region, it was expected that there would be more Black males who had attended this community college in the study pool.

Ten of the men graduated from one of the community colleges with a degree or a degree and a certificate. Ten of the fifteen are fathers and one has a daughter who is a college graduate. Three of the fifteen served in the military and two of the three received financial assistance while in college because of military service. Except for one Muslim in the group, they all consider themselves “Christians” in the values that were instilled early in their lives, though they define their spirituality individually.

#### Community Colleges Attended

All three colleges cited in this research are public institutions located in an urban metropolitan area. They were selected because they serve a diverse student population, which would yield a large population of Black male students. The colleges are accessible by public transportation. They offer similar programs of study and award similar degrees. One school has a total enrollment of over 2,500 students; another school is in the midrange with a total enrollment of over 7,000, while the third school has a total enrollment of over 13,000 students. For anonymity, the colleges are named after cities in Ghana, West Africa.

#### Accra Community College.

This college has a total enrollment of over 13,000 students and prides itself on its diversity and inclusion. It is the largest community college in the state and region where it is located and 63% of its population is students of color and international students, who represent more than 100 countries in the world, speaking more than 70 different languages. Female students are in the majority (58%) and the majority of its students,

who average age 27, are employed. Accra Community College has 145 full-time faculty members and 550 part-time (adjunct) faculty. Though it has strong female representation of full-time faculty at 79%, Blacks comprise only around 10% of the total. This college has institutionalized learning communities and has been awarded two national student success grants.

#### Kumasi Community College.

This college is located in the Black community and has over 2,500 full and part-time students. Roughly 85 % of its students are Black and Latino/a; females comprise nearly 60 % of the total enrollment. This college has a stated commitment to serving the diverse community that surrounds it and has articulation agreements with two of the universities that are near its campus. The college has 50 full-time faculty and 115 part-time (adjunct) faculty members. The majority of employees at the college are female. Over 50% of the college's full-time employees are Black; nearly 30% are white and over 10% are Latino/a. As with Accra Community College, it has also received two national student success grants.

#### Cape Coast Community College.

This college is located in a suburb that is adjacent to the greater metropolitan urban area. It has a total enrollment of over 7,000. The majority of its students are female (60%) and Black students are about 13% of its total enrollment. Nearly 60% of the students at this college are white. The college offers career programs and has a thriving biotechnology program. It has 75 full-time and 278 part-time (adjunct) faculty members. It is different from the other two community colleges because it is somewhat on the

fringes of the urban center and has a geographic diversity; it draws students from the large city that is central and the surrounding towns and villages.

### Profiles of Eight Participants

The eight brief profiles that follow provide insight into the lives of some of the Black males who participated in this study. This overview will provide insight into their lives and experiences. The other seven participants are briefly profiled in Appendix K. Chapter 5 will provide an in-depth analysis of all fifteen study participants. These eight here were chosen because they are representative of the study pool of participants. They range in age from 23 to 48. Two of the participants are in their 40s, one is in his mid-30s, two are in their early 30s, one is in his late 20s, and two are in their early 20s. Six of these eight men were born in the United States; some were born to immigrant parents. The diversity reflected in their family histories is reflective of the cultural mix that defines Blacks in the Diaspora. These men are all from the urban metropolitan area under study; they live in predominantly Black areas and three of the five live in neighborhoods that are “entirely Black,” as one participant described it. One man lives in a small room in a shared residence for men who are in transition after being temporarily homeless. One man lives in a house with his wife and their infant son. Another man shares his residence with his female partner and six children, three of whom are his. Two of the men live alone, while two others live with family members. The youngest man in the group lives with his female partner and their six-month-old baby in a duplex apartment with his mother, father, younger sister, younger brother, and older brother. All of the men in this profile group were raised under strong religious traditions. Two were raised Baptist; one



was raised Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal (AME); two were raised Pentecostal; and one was raised Seventh Day Adventist; and two were raised Catholic. Regardless of the traditions they were raised in these study participants consider themselves Christian. With the exception of one participant who was raised Christian but adopted Islam as his faith in his late 20s.

The following profiles provide insight into the experiences of these men. The names of famous Black male writers and thinkers, randomly selected and assigned, were used as pseudonyms for the subjects included in these profiles and for the other seven subjects in this research. The profiles include background information, colleges attended, career goals and aspirations, how spirituality is constructed and how it functions in their lives, especially in situations where they may encounter racial microaggressions, and their experiences with racial microaggressions at a community college they attended. Many of the personal insights and stories they volunteered to share are included in these profiles.

Many of the men highlighted in these profiles and in Chapter 5 were challenged to isolate the racial microaggressions they encountered while attending a community college from the racial microaggressions they encounter in general because, many shared, racism is so pervasive. For many of them, one event would remind them of another, producing a trail of stories about their encounters with racial microaggressions and how they made them feel.

Alex Haley.

Alex was born in America to parents who emigrated from Haiti. He is single, in his early 30s and lives in the family home. He attended both Kumasi and Accra Community College and graduated from a 4-year public institution with a degree in applied sociology. He was raised, for a portion of his life, in a large mid-western city with a sizable Black population. Though raised Christian, he embraced Islam in his late 20s and changed his name to reflect his commitment. Interestingly, he uses the names “God” and “Allah” interchangeably in his discussions and makes a lot of references to both his Christian and Islamic values.

He has worked with youth in the past and seeks a solid career in education or social services where he can “give back” to those who are in need of help and direction. His concern about social issues and social justice has influenced his desire to work in community-based programs where he can help the incarcerated reenter society, assist youth so they will make wise choices about their education, and empower them with dignity and purpose so they are not tempted to “chase fast money.” He spoke about American values and media influences and how “they are warping the minds of young people and forcing them into corners where many can’t escape.”

Alex attributes a lot to his religion, even suggesting that Islam saved his life. He spoke of the Prophet Mohammed with passion and zeal, smiling as he talked, exuding a certainty and confidence that kept him engaged in conversation. He spoke of having a connection to God that gives him a special sense and awareness about life and the world. He said his spirituality keeps him motivated. “It keeps me grounded. It makes me a better person.” Alex said that he always turns to God for his answers.

Alex attended a community college that was predominantly Black and Latino (Kumasi Community College) and could not recall any dramatic racial encounters while there, but was eager to share the many negative experiences he had while in attendance at Accra Community College. He shared the joy of “being in classes with all kinds of students,” but feeling alienated and upset by the many racial microaggressions he observed and experienced personally. While at Accra Community College, he had a campus job that gave him insight and he had a lot of experiences he said he would not have had if he were a commuting student. He told of being referred to as “boy” on many occasions and feeling “upset” with the reference. He said that having a campus job was upsetting to him because every day he worked he observed, white staff members treating Black students differently from the way they treated white students at registration, at the financial aid counter, at the help desk, and even in the cafeteria. He said many of the Black students would share their feelings and frustrations with him, and he said he would tell them “not to worry about it, just get your education.” In hindsight, he said he wished he had been more assertive, but he said that he “turns to God” in those situations rather than risk the agony that would follow if he were to “act out.” He said that when confronted with these challenges of race his spirituality helps him because “I know I have God with me, and I will be a winner.”

Amiri Baraka.

Amiri attended Cape Coast Community College and Accra Community College. He is the father of three children and lives in a household with six children and his female partner. He graduated from Accra Community College and transferred to a public 4-year

institution where he received a bachelor's degree in education and history. He went on to a private university where he received a Master's degree in education. He works with teenagers in a community youth program; he was a classroom teacher in an urban high school for few years after receiving his Master's degree. He has plans to further his education later and wants to continue working with youth, possibly as a high school guidance counselor or a school principal.

Amiri says he believes in a Higher Power that "many people call many different things." He, too, said that his spirituality keeps him grounded, "it is my moral compass." He says his spirituality keeps him "doing the right things even though no one is watching." The utility of his spirituality carries over into the work that he does counseling youth of all ages. He says that he feels a duty and commitment to guide them as his spirituality guides him.

He said that he is not shocked by racism or racial microaggressions. "It is like an old injury you are carrying around," he offered. When pressed for clarity, he said that "Blacks have been wounded by racism" and have persevered even though "carrying injuries from the battle." He said you don't expect things to be any different because they have been that way for so long [the history of racism in America], but he still spoke, with optimism, about fighting racism with spirituality and staying determined to conquer it. He said that he has to be realistic about what is happening in the world because he has children to raise. He says he embraces his spirituality because "that was the way I was raised; that is the way I am supposed to be."

While at Accra Community College he was the President of the African American Student Association. He said that he learned a lot while in that position because the

Director of Student Activities provided no support for the group, only funding. He said, “The white people wanted to have nothing to do with the group.” He said he felt bad about how they were treated and how they were called by some as “just a bunch of n-----s.” Amiri repeated many times that these situations are “sad, very, very sad.” He said that a “Higher Power” keeps him doing the right thing, providing him with what he needs. And the right thing for him is not to respond with violence or rage. He said “you have to push through this with spirit, will, and determination.”

August Wilson.

August is forty-eight years old. He was born in Boston and is the youngest of four sons born to his parents. He was never married, and has an adult daughter who is a schoolteacher. Raised Catholic, his career goal is to be a trained and licensed counselor for inner city youth. He also intends to get a certificate in addiction counseling. He graduated from Accra Community College, the only community college he attended. He is going to attend a public university for his bachelor’s degree and he intends to get a Master’s degree in counseling.

August offered that “Jesus Christ is my Savior and I rely on him.” He said that he is a Christian and has shed the teachings of the Catholicism he was exposed to as a child. He said his religion keeps him grounded and focused. August said he trusts that “God has a plan and all things happen through Him.” It is this trust that outcomes will be favorable that keeps him committed to his goals, even in times of struggle. He feels that if he had used Jesus to walk with him through his personal struggles, he would have persevered and hurdled the obstacles. He shared that he made many mistakes in the past and had

quite a few setbacks. He sees his life purpose is to help other human beings, and this is tied into his spirituality. He feels that spirituality is missing in the Black community and he feels he can help to bring new and powerful messages to young people.

August recounted a situation he experienced at Accra Community College. When he first started school there, he had a female instructor who referred to him as a “boy.” He said he responded to this immediately because “I am a grown man.” He said that the professor was apologetic, but nervous. He also said that while at Accra Community College he noticed on many occasions that Black students would get lower grades on written assignments than white students. He said that on one occasion a professor was very nervous when he inquired, turning red and denying that she graded students differently. He noted that after that she was always extra nice to him, almost patronizing. He said that he noticed grade inflation for white students, but not for Blacks. He said that he is a good writer and was a great student with a 3.85 GPA. He says he always looks at how Black students are graded and it bothers him that these injustices occur.

August offered that his spirituality is an essential part of his being. “I think I express it in the way I walk and talk and in my being.” When managing racial microaggressions, he said, “I try not to be negative, and I try not to hurt anybody. I just try to be a loving human being toward all people.”

Frederick Douglass.

Frederick is a thirty-five year old father of a newborn son. He was born in Haiti of Haitian parents. He attended Accra Community College and graduated with a business degree. From Accra he went to a private, elite business university where he received a

bachelor's degree in accounting. He plans to return to school for an MBA, but intends to take certification examinations in finance prior to returning to school to advance himself professionally. He currently works for a Fortune 500 company and owns three properties in the Black community where he resides. He was raised Seventh Day Adventist, but currently has no formal religion he practices. He says he practices "love" as a religion.

In discussing his spirituality, he said he "I treat people the way I would love to be treated." He said that even in those situations where he is treated badly by someone, he still "cannot do that to them." He says that only a daily basis his spirituality shows up because he makes a commitment to "do something good for someone." He sees helping behavior as critically important to who we are as human beings because the behavior can be passed on to others so that we perpetuate goodness. He said we "are here on earth to be as good as possible."

He says he has experienced racism because of his dark skin color and his accent. Being Haitian and Black, he says he encounters racism "every day." While at Accra Community College, he was very active with student government and recalls many situations where racism was "a problem." One situation he cited involved a staff member in the computer lab who used a "racial slur" and "treated someone like they were less than a person." He said he reported the person to their supervisor and he hoped "that person would see others differently." He said there were some apologies made, but the change was only temporary because the person did the same thing again some weeks later to another student, but it was never formally reported.

Frederick said that he just "forgives" when he encounters racial microaggressions, even those he responded to while at student at Accra Community College. He does not

see himself having any choice other than forgiveness because he feels that if you don't forgive, you will act and act out. Forgiveness tempers the situation and brings peace, for him.

James Baldwin.

James also attended Accra Community College. He graduated with an associate of science degree and received a B.S. in business administration from a local private university. He is forty-five years old and lives alone. James is the youngest of eleven children born to his mother. He has no children of his own and is a self-employed business consultant. He is currently exploring law schools and business schools with the hope of applying next year. James was raised Catholic but does not have any current formal church affiliation.

When asked about his spirituality, he said he takes on the energies of many different faiths. He says he has friends who are Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and Jewish and he has learned from them all. He feels that he cannot be pigeonholed because he says he is "eclectic" and expansive in his religious belief system. He feels he is on a new spiritual journey, and he has been focusing on being in tune with a Higher Power. He sees spirituality as being most important to his life because he feels it can help him become a better person if he makes the personal adjustments needed to feel peace and hope within. This would involve even more prayer and meditation. He feels spirituality is his moral compass.

While at Accra Community College, James was enrolled in a class with a business professor who made racist remarks about Black students, implying they are stupid and



will never succeed in business. He said this happened on more than one occasion and he decided to do something about it. He said the comments made him feel very uncomfortable, and he and another student took action. He said he was angry over what he heard, and he took action because it was “the right thing to do.” He filed a grievance with the college and with the federal Office of Education, Civil Rights division. An investigation was conducted and the college was instructed to make some procedural changes to accommodate complaints. James said that he was pleased with what the case exposed and was glad the situation was brought to light.

James said he noticed a lot of bias while at Accra Community College and felt he could not respond to everything he saw that was racist and wrong. He mentioned differential treatment in the classroom for Black students and preferential treatment for white students, rude behavior from staff in positions to serve students, disrespect from campus police, and no real support or assistance for Black students seeking tutoring, advising, or counseling. He tried to inform other students that they did not have to put up with the racism at the college because there were things they could do to combat it. James said that he is very vocal and just can’t sit back and watch injustices. He says that for years he held on to a lot of bitterness because of what he had personally experienced and what he had observed while at Accra Community College. He felt it unfair that the “cards were stacked against me because I am a man of color.” He said that he knows that the “race card” is going to be played because he is a Black man. James said he wants to be treated fairly and will not sit back in silence. He will find a way to complain; he says he will write, call, or register a complaint in some way. These strategies and tactics, he feels, help him to stay grounded in his commitment to truth and justice while avoiding negative

behaviors because “if I act out or lash out the way they do, I would just screw myself.” His option, he feels, is to use truth and compassion.

Langston Hughes.

Langston is twenty-three years old and lives in an “entirely Black” community with his fiancé and their 6 month old son. He shares the duplex apartment with his mother, father, older brother, and younger sister and brother. He attended both Accra Community College and Kumasi Community College in the past and needs twenty credits to graduate. He has a 3.7 GPA and plans to attend a public university. He was raised Baptist and considers himself a Christian.

With a faith and religious tradition rooted in Southern Baptist theology, Langston was influenced by his family’s religious tenacity early in his life. “My grandfather believes that Jesus Christ is the answer to everything and no matter what, Jesus Christ will make a way for you,” Langston said. “I believe in Jesus; I believe in God; I believe in a Higher Being. I believe that there are spirits around us and among us. Your faith is important. You see, I grew up in the Baptist church and I feel if you keep it real with yourself and others, people will see that. I believe in being kind to people.” Langston says his spirituality provides him with hope. He says there is always something to look forward to and your faith and beliefs can guide you.

While attending Accra Community College, Langston was given a low grade by an English professor. He said this professor is notorious for giving low grades to Black students. He said that of all of the Black students he talked to who had taken a class with this professor; none had received higher than a “C.” He said this professor never had any

comments on his paper and would be trembling whenever he went to speak with him. He said that this professor had given him As on three of his papers so he was concerned when he got a C at the end of the semester. Since he has high standards for himself, Langston said he could not allow himself to be misjudged, discriminated against, or given a grade he did not deserve. After meeting with the professor on three different occasions he took the matter to the dean and was given a B+ for the class, a grade he said he deserved.

“I have seen people literally ignore Black people who would ask for help at some of the service counters at the college,” Langston shared. “There are people at the college who don’t want to have anything to do with Black people. They ignore you; they don’t look at you, and they treat white people differently.” When asked if these were daily occurrences, he responded, “Oh, yes, definitely.” He said he does “what is right” when confronting these issues, and this “right” behavior is rooted in his religious and spiritual beliefs.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin is in his early twenties and was an honor student while at Accra Community College. He ventured into the community college system after taking a few classes at Cape Coast Community College in the past. Finances and access influenced his decision to pursue college at community colleges first. He graduated with honors and attended a very elite university in the urban area under study. He has spent time working as a volunteer in community organizing and politics and plans to go to law school before going into public service and politics full time.

Martin grew up in a predominantly Black area and has always valued education. He received a lot of support and direction from his parents and from the large and powerful Baptist church he attended as a child and is still affiliated with. This institution is noted throughout the city for its committed large membership and it has a powerful voice in the community and in the politics of the city. This is one of the many Black churches in this area that exemplifies the role of the Black church as both a religious and political institution.

He said that his spirituality is very important to his life. “For me, coming from a family that is very spiritual, it always comes back to me believing in a Higher Power. I truly believe that my path is already written, and I’m already traveling down the path. And I do believe that God has great things in store for me.” Humbled by his successes and achievements, he says his spirituality helps him to “remain level headed, to not get too far ahead of myself, and also it has allowed me to maintain that sense of hunger and commitment to follow through and continue to push forward on the path that has been laid out for me.” He said he has a huge debt to pay in the future, “a huge responsibility to pay it forward, everything I have been blessed with, to pass it along.”

Of the many stories and insights he shared, Martin registered his frustration with those Blacks who don’t take action when confronted with a racial microaggression. He spoke about witnessing many while at Accra Community College and said that he could “feel this strange kind of mood in the college” that suggested that “people aren’t being real.” He said he noticed how white professors would treat Black students differently, making comments about poor performance and using humor to put them down. On one occasion he said he noticed white students giving a Black professor poor

evaluations on an assessment form that had been distributed to the class by a proctor. He said that a few students didn't even read the questions, they just "colored in poor all the way down the evaluation sheet. I mean, that is cruel," he said, "to give someone low scores when they are good just because they are Black." Martin said that the perpetrators of racial microaggressions are "sick and need help. When people are sick," he said, "you pray for them."

Richard Wright.

Richard is thirty-four years old and is the father of a six-year old daughter who lives with her mother. He shares custody, but was never married to the mother of his child. He works as a youth counselor and graduated from Accra Community College, where he received a phlebotomy certificate in addition to getting an associate's degree in liberal arts. He went on to graduate from a state university with a bachelor's degree in Africana studies and education and has plans to get a Master's degree in social work or counseling. Ultimately, he would like a doctorate in psychology or counseling. He is devoted to helping urban youth and has received a lot of praise for his work with teenagers.

Richard considers himself a "spiritual" person and, though raised Christian and Pentecostal, he currently has no formal church affiliation. He engages in prayer and meditation and believes in God. He says that "spirituality is my guiding force. I am a spiritualist, and I believe in a Higher Power." He relies on his spiritual beliefs to guide him when things get tough. He has chosen a career goal that he feels will allow him to

“give back,” to help others because he feels he was helped in the past. He sees his career goals as being tied to his belief that people should help each other.

He said that his spirituality connects him to all people and he expresses it in the way he treats people, all people. He said, “I treat complete strangers as if they are my friends.” Keeping this commitment in focus was a challenge for him while at Accra Community College where he encountered racial microaggressions. When discussing his encounters, Richard was forthcoming. He spoke of coming to this country from Barbados years ago and being “traumatized” by racism, as he described it. He said that he had a history professor at Accra Community College who would publicly insult Black students who came late to his class. He said he did not immediately call this incident “racial” because he takes racism seriously and does not like to use “the race card.” After a while he said he could not help but speak out. He said he tried to be respectful of the professor, but noticed that he treated white students and Black students differently. He spoke out in class and the professor listened to what he had to say, but his behavior did not really change. When queried about what he felt initially, Richard said he felt “angry.” Richard spoke of Black males being judged very harshly and blames the media for perpetuating negative stereotypes about Black people. “People are disconnected; there is no one-to-one because of racism.” He said that while at Accra Community College, he sometimes felt “invisible” because people would pass by him as if he “did not exist,” as if he were not “a human being.” He uses his spirituality in these situations to help him detach from the stress and stay focused on his goals.

The experiences of this group of Black males provides insight into the ways they use their spiritual grounding to help them manage the stresses that could interrupt their decision to continue their education.

### Racial Microaggressions and Spirituality

The theories that guided this research were used to identify and explain racial microaggressions as lived experiences for the participants of this study. When a Black male is confronted with a racial microaggression, he can choose from a number of different responses. What guides his decision to select a certain action or inaction? What thoughts and ideas influence how he will respond? Connecting the theories to the experiences will provide the bridge to the analysis of the data gathered for this research.

Racial microaggressions can occur as microinsults, microinvalidations, or microassaults. These microaggressions have themes that are rooted in stereotypes about Black people. These themes suggest intellectual inferiority, second-class citizenship, the inferiority of Blackness, the superiority of whiteness, and, in the case of Black males, an assumption of criminality. When these microaggressions occur, it is important to first understand how these microaggressions made these Black males feel and what thoughts were generated. An examination of the actions they took as a result of what they experienced may show a connection between a microaggression action and a response from the recipient. Critical to this research is the influence their spirituality had on their response. Through the data analyses the themes that emerge may target the elements of spirituality that have a special utility and purpose for the Black males who participated in

this research. What these men think about and what they do provide insight into the utility and importance of spirituality in their lives when they are confronted with racial microaggressions.

There were many common themes that can be identified from the short profiles of the eight men selected from the pool of fifteen. These included a reliance on God or a Higher Power as guide and protector, compassion, the assumption that Black males are inferior in intelligence, the commitment to helping others, and “doing what is right.” These themes will be explored and unpacked in Chapter 5 in greater detail along with a discussion of the embedded themes that emerged from the data on all fifteen men involved in this research.



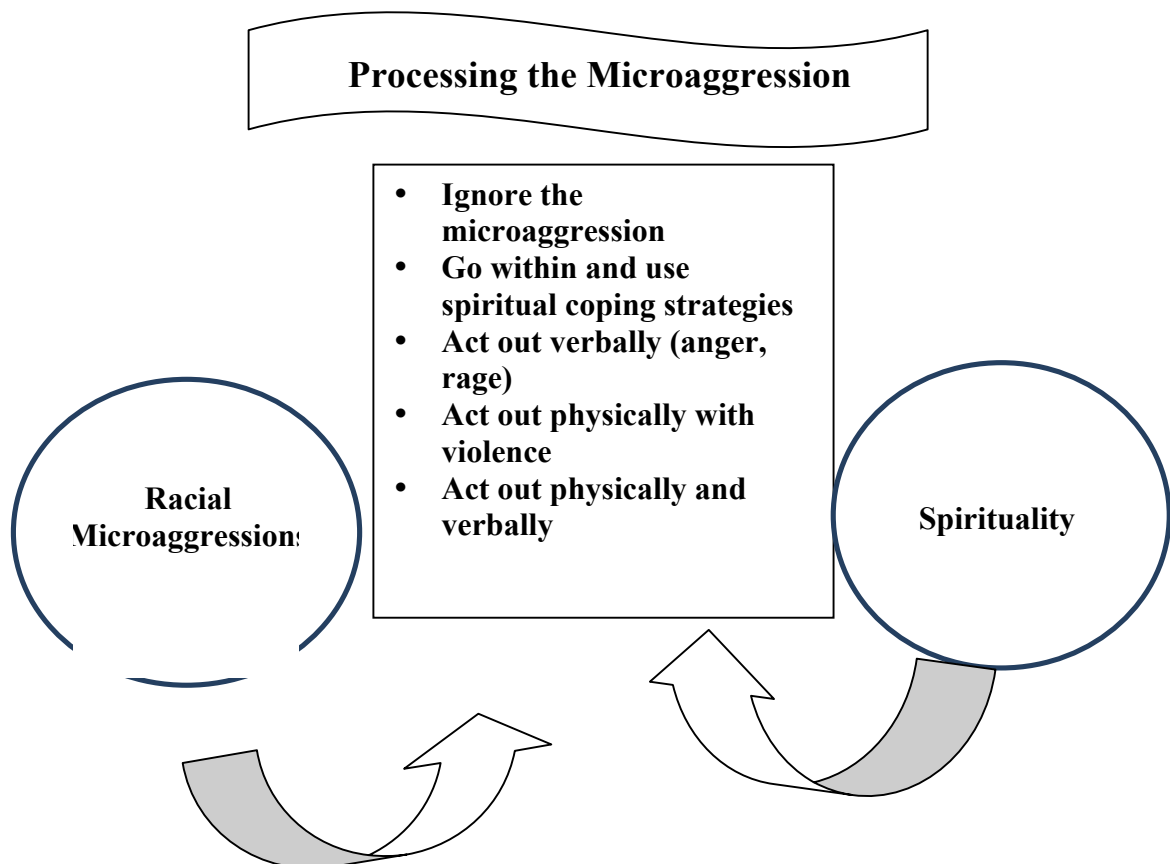
## CHAPTER 5

### DATA ANALYSIS

Black males who attend college can expect to encounter “racist and culturally unresponsive campus environments” as they navigate their way through higher education and degree attainment (Harper, 2012). The fifteen men selected for participation in this research shared their experiences with racial microaggressions and how their spirituality helped them manage the stresses associated with the microinsults, microinvalidations, and microassaults. This research uncovered some themes and spiritual strategies that explain how these participants were able to successfully confront the microaggressions and remain focused on their academic goals. Important to this data analysis was the input from peer debriefers who read the transcripts of interviews, and provided insights and interpretations of the data. Their assistance in this work added value; as educators and practitioners, they have years of experience with Black males in educational settings and are aware of the many challenges they must manage as they seek higher education. Their support in this work expanded the analysis. Responding to their comments and questions broadened the scope of the analysis, and brought more credibility because the data are reviewed and analyzed by a group of individuals.

In this chapter I utilized the framework for data analysis outlined in Chapter 3. The racial microaggression incidents findings will be presented with a discussion of their

themes. Second, the responses from the Black male study participants will be presented and connected to the elements of their spirituality that explain their responses, i.e. the practices and values grounded in their spirituality and connected to the Christian teachings of the Black church. Finally, I will discuss the emerging themes, embedded in the research, that provide insight into the utility of spirituality, identifying the specific qualities and traits expressed in the strategies the participants used to mitigate the effects of racial microaggressions. (See Figure 7.)



*Figure 7. Response Analyses: Spirituality as a choice.*

In responding to racial microaggressions, Black males have many choices they may consider. These range from ignoring the microaggression by not responding directly, even though the microaggression has been “processed” and considered, to acting out

physically and verbally. The responses may be any combination of possible actions. The choices Black males make in these situations inform their function as a tool to mitigate the effects of racial microaggressions.

### Racial Microaggression Incidents and Themes

This section will examine the reported incidents of racial microaggressions. It will look at the racial microinsults (demeaning communications and interpersonal exchanges rooted in stereotypes), microinvalidations (excluding and negating the reality or experiences of others), and microassaults (conscious and deliberate biases expressed in actions and behaviors) extracted from the experiences of the Black male study participants and the recurring themes, stereotypes, and assumptions that are rooted in these microaggressions (Sue, 2010). When reporting acts of racism and racial microaggressions they encountered while attending a community college, most study participants were alarmed by the unexpected encounters.

The research on racial microaggressions highlighted a group of common offensive themes that were evident (Sue, Nadal, et al., 2008). Among them, for Black males, are the assumption of criminality, the assumption of inferior status, and the ascription of intellectual inferiority, and the assumed superiority of white values. Though existing research explored how microaggressions function with other groups marginalized by race, class, and gender (Sue, 2011), for the purpose of this research, however, the more common themes for Black males are used to guide the discussion.

As outlined in the chart above, the racial microaggressions elicited a response from the Black males. Their response choices may have been influenced and informed by

their spirituality. As the elements of racial microaggressions were employed to demean, devalue, or negate the reality and lives of these young men, the spirituality themes used to counter these attacks provided tools that may have tempered the negative effects of the microaggressions.

Theme: Intelligence Inferiority.

Assumptions about the intelligence of Blacks is one of the primary themes evident in the research on racism and racial microaggressions (Sue, 2010). In this research, the accounts of study participants provided evidence that these stereotypes about intelligence are common.

Langston Hughes attended Kumasi Community College before attending Accra Community College and recalled, being right out of high school, his experience and what the professor told the freshman class:

Most of you guys are going to drop out so let's get through this class. If you don't want to come, don't come. And, like, I'm thinking, this is a white woman. So, psychologically, in my head I said, I am not going to come any more because she doesn't expect me to come anyway. So, I actually didn't complete that course because of that reason.

Many Black males viewed the campus environment as hostile and unwelcoming and felt they were treated differently by white professors. Booker T. Washington reported feeling unwelcome each time he would attend an English class at Accra Community College. He called it "racial profiling" and said that many teachers would look at him differently and make requests of him that were not made of other [white] students. He

said that being ignored when he raised his hand to answer a question or having a professor sigh if he contributed to a conversation made him feel inadequate and dumb, “even though I know I am intelligent.”

These incidents, though reported here as isolated events, were often connected to a series of actions during one occasion or over time. As Booker T. noted in the above account, each time he attended class he felt “unwelcome.” Equally alienating were the ascriptions of inferiority that were often masked in offensive behaviors designed to make Black males feel “less than.” Many of the study participants reported classroom situations in their college experience where lower intelligence ascriptions were assigned to them, that in many cases, were tied into low expectations of performance by them.

Ernest Gaines reported, coming from St. Kitts to America, that “a lot of times I really didn’t get it in the past [racial microaggressions], but I can recall situations with professors where I would do well in math and they would think I had cheated or something because my grades would be good. In college you expect to be supported.”

The fact that many Black males performed well and consistently produced quality work seemed to mystify some of their professors, with many faculty doubting and questioning these students.

Countee Cullen mentioned that, “I got B pluses and As on everything; there was no possible way to cheat. But the professor kept badgering me like I didn’t know the material, like I cheated.” This statement speaks to this participant’s concern about how he was perceived when he did well. He assumed that if he did well, the professor will think he had cheated because the professor did not expect Black male students to do well unless they cheated. This incident addressed both the ascription of intelligence inferiority

and inferiority as a person theme, suggesting, possibly, that Black males have no moral or ethical grounding, and must cheat in order to perform well on exams.

The references to intelligence and the racial microaggressions based on intelligence inferiority are often addressed or evident when Black students question grades they receive on papers or exams. Ed Bullins observed this in one class where a business professor told a Black student that “this is just the way it was scored.” He said the student never said anything and just accepted the grade. “This happens often,” he said, and “many Black students don’t report it.”

In another in a series of encounters he reported, Countee Cullen said he had “a lot of these [racial microaggression] experiences while at the community college [Accra Community College]. His encounter on his first day of class he defined as being “unsettling:”

It was my first day of class and I had to take a shuttle bus to the other campus  
And I walked into the biology class; I was a little late because the bus was late  
going over the bridge. I was about fifteen minutes late. I walked into the class,  
greeted the professor and since all the seats in the front of the class were taken, I  
said I would sit in the back. The professor said, yes, you should sit in the back  
because you are probably not going to do any work anyway. I was shocked. And  
then the most hilarious thing happened. When we got some papers back he saw  
how smart I am.

Cullen said he ended up with the highest grade in the class and he knew and felt the professor was embarrassed the entire semester by his earlier comment. He never brought

up how he had been treated to the professor, but he said he knew the professor was aware of the race-based blunder. Cullen said his revenge was getting good grades in the course.

The experiences of these Black male study participants who attended diverse higher education institutions ran the risk of compromising their academic achievement because they “confront unrelenting oppression and discrimination as part of their everyday college experiences” and may “struggle to survive” (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). The emphatic voices of the study participants speak to the stresses they must manage to be successful in their education endeavors while managing oppression of racial microaggressions.

The assumption of intelligence inferiority and the expectation of poor performance may lead to conflicts that are reported to campus authorities for adjudication. When Langston Hughes took on a battle with an English professor over his grades, he said he felt “angry.” When the professor changed his C- grade to a B+, he still was not happy because he felt he had not been graded fairly or treated fairly given the fact that he, and other students in the class, had determined that he was the brightest student in the class. He went to the Dean and he felt diminished because the dean thought he should not complain since he got a good grade. He said that he produced a portfolio of all of his writing and when assessed together, his grades averaged A-. He wanted to know, and pressed the point, how he could have initially been given a C-. The professor said “she thought I had handed in some work late; that just ain’t true.”

While taking a business class at Accra Community College James Baldwin reported that his professor made “racist” comments about “African Americans and some international students and [it] made me feel uncomfortable.” He said that all Black

students generally do poorly in college because most don't have the intelligence or drive, and they should always have a back-up plan since they are likely to fail. The same professor said international students won't make it because they "can't speak the language." Baldwin was "shocked" by the comments and thought the professor was "crazy saying these things." His response was shock, then anger, and he filed a grievance against the professor. The professor was reprimanded and offered apologies to the students.

Frederick Douglass recounted a situation when he returned to Accra Community College for a fund-raising event. He mentioned the prestigious business school he attended for his undergraduate degree after graduating from Accra and a white professor responded with, "You joking?" The disbelief that he could have attended the school speaks to the disbelief that he, a Black man, could be bright enough to have been accepted and graduate. Further, when he mentions the international financial investment firm he works for as an analyst, he was asked how "he" was able to get the job. He said he returns to Accra for events to inspire students and to dispel myths about the intelligence and abilities of Black males.

Too often the experiences Black males encounter are tied into assumptions about their intelligence, are compounded by how they appear to others, and expectations about their behavior. Langston Hughes recalled attending Accra Community College after leaving Kumasi Community College.

I went to the college and retook the placement test for English. When I got into the class the professor, an Asian lady, asked me if I was in the right class because I had on "Tims," [Timberland boots] a "scully," [a tight fitting cap] a "hoodie" [a



sweatshirt with a hood] on my head and I didn't *appear* to be the greatest student to her. And so she asked if I was in the right place and asked to see my schedule. I had wanted to get there early so I could sit up front. She handed me my schedule, rolled her eyes, and looked around at the seats in the back as if to ask why are you not sitting back there. So, I decided to sit in front every day in that class and to notice her visible nervousness as she taught the class. I sat in front all semester. I was there to learn.

In a similar story, Amiri Baraka said he can tell some of his professors have been “scared.”

Up until I start to speak, they don't know what is going to happen. Even though this is not the streets, this is a college classroom! I am not going to mug you. I am just asking you a question or two. Don't be scared. When I start to speak, they seem relieved when they *hear* intelligence.

August Wilson said that the references made to Blacks as being less intelligent than whites “angered” him. He blamed a lot of this on media and, as with James Baldwin, these claims made him feel uncomfortable. Booker T. Washington expressed discomfort at having his professor think he was in the wrong class when the semester began and he showed up a few minutes late to his class because of problems finding the classroom location. He said he was made to feel as if “he didn't belong.” Though he was motivated to achieve, he admitted that he was never really made to feel he belonged in the class. He said he found this especially true in this, a math class, and in his English classes.

Theme: Inferiority of Blackness, Superiority of Whiteness.

The desire to get a college degree was a driving force for these Black men who persist in spite of the racial microaggressions they have to manage. From the time they entered the classroom until they graduated, transferred, or dropped-out, they were subjected to the possibility that a racial microaggression might interfere with their plans and progress.

Martin Luther King, Jr., described it as such:

Unfortunately, racism is in the classroom, in the halls, in the world. There are ways that people look at you that let you know that they hold some ill feeling toward you. It's like we [Black people] have "race radar" where we can sense or spot the racists.

Campus racial climates have been one of the factors studied and considered as researchers seek evidence to explain the differences in persistence and adjustment to college for Black and white students (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999). As Martin pointed out, many Black students sense that they are not included in the campus culture. This sense of not belonging might impact the entire college experience for these Black men.

Amiri Baraka pointed out that during his tenure at Accra Community College racial microaggressions were always present, but were generally very subtle. He recounted being in the bookstore of the college and having the clerk assume he was an athlete because of his size and stature. Athletes on sports teams at the college receive book vouchers from the athletics department. As he told the story, he laughed, saying he told the clerk he was not an athlete and his honesty kept him from walking away with

three hundred dollars' worth of books that she would have used an athletics department voucher to pay for. The assumption that Black males are on athletic scholarships at college is common (Harper, 2008). The feelings many have about being seen as either visible as an athlete or invisible as a person was noted in many of the comments and responses where the study participants felt ignored as a person, but visible as a suspect of a crime.

The issue of inferiority as a person because of being Black manifested as a theme and issue throughout this research, though often veiled in other contexts. For example, Booker T. Washington reported that he 'becomes a person' in the eyes of white professors because "I sound educated and intelligent." The external appearance of a person (dark skin) seems to influence the assumptions those in the majority culture make about that person. These assumptions may be complex and may create confusion for someone who is expecting a dark skinned person to be unintelligent and discovers they are not. This confusion speaks to the "larger societal dynamic for African American males...that they are expected to function within a culture that silences, abuses, and devalues their existence" (Pierre, Mahalik, & Woodland, 2001). That Washington had to "display" his intelligence in order to be valued as a person reveals some of the options Black males may use as they find ways to manage racial microaggressions. Though these situations inspire anger in most, there is still the option to respond with intelligence rather than rage.

Ernest Gaines said there are "white people who will be kind to Black people, but in the back of their minds they think white people are superior to Black people, and Black people are stupid." He went on to share an experience he had in a sociology class he took

at Accra Community College. He said he expected a white student who sat near him to do well in the course because he appeared well-educated and well-spoken. He said this student was always called on to answer the professor's questions even though he was always drawing on a pad at his desk and not giving the class his full attention. Gaines said that when the first exams were returned, he had a higher grade than this student. Gaines' assumption that the white student was superior to him was struck down after there was evidence for him that he was more capable once he received his first exam grade.

Amiri Baraka said that he felt many of his professors "did not care about Black students." When queried, he responded that "they don't look at you. It's like you are invisible." But, he said he would often laugh because people would assume he was on a sports team because of his size. Then they would see him, but he said he felt they assumed he was not smart and that he would likely fail his classes. Because of this, he said he made it a point not to speak to his professors face to face for a while because his size would intimidate them. He said he would wait until they were comfortable enough with the class and relaxed and then they could get "close and talk like normal people." He said he was often greeted with expressions of shock and surprise from his professors and classmates when he would demonstrate his intelligence in classroom activities by explaining complex concepts or responding with long statements and insightful discourse.

Baraka, who was the leader of a Black student group, stated that the administrators of the community college he attended seemed to not care about the Black student organization he led. He spoke of their failure to oversee its operation and the free

reign he had as its leader. “They did not know what to do with the group,” he said, so it seemed they did nothing. It was as if the group was invisible and left to function independent of the other student groups and the college. This “invisibility” is rooted in what Pierre, Mahalik, & Woodland (2001) believe is the notion that Black men and Black people are not “seen” as being worthy of recognition, attention, or acknowledgment.

Many participants spoke of the burden they feel they must carry “for the race” as they manage these racial microaggressions. Ralph Ellison said he felt pressure at times as the only Black male in a class. He said he felt “frustrated” because of all the negativity already heaped on Black males and this made it difficult for him in those classes where he was “the only one.” These pressures were often tied into the subject being taught. The pressures were especially felt in history classes where the issue of slavery or poverty might be discussed. He said that “all eyes would be on me” if he were the only Black student in the class or one of a few. He said he even felt this “frustration” in an African American literature class he took at Accra Community College with a white professor because he felt the professor and the students “did not really understand.”

The issue of inferiority, often contexted as second-class status, was especially difficult for those study participants with accents. The assumptions about them were compounded because it was assumed they were unintelligent and culturally deprived because they were not born in America. For Frederick Douglass, Ernest Gaines, and Richard Wright, being born in the Caribbean and being Black men at a community college brought with it the challenges of being Black males along and being “foreign.”

Frederick Douglass reported that he felt marginalized because he was Black and had an accent. Since he was known at the community college he attended because he was

active in student government, he felt many people would hide their true feelings. On one occasion he advocated for a student who was the target of demeaning comments from a white staff member in the computer lab. Douglass would not call the comments racial slurs, per se, but said the person was treated like “they were nothing.” The employee would help white students, ignoring this student, and when the student spoke up, the employee told the Black student to “go back where you came from.” Frederick said he spoke with the boss of that person, a white male, and the computer staff member realized she was “possibly wrong” and offered a curt apology. He mentioned that he personally dealt with racial microaggressions every day in his professional life and dealt with many while a student at the community college.

When asked how racial microaggressions made him feel, Douglass offered,

These people- when they get to know people maybe they will act differently.

When they think of foreigners [Blacks from other countries], and Blacks, it is based on what they see on TV. They assume you are what they see on TV - you come from a certain place [a Black neighborhood], you have been in jail. It is negative. It is sad.

Like Douglass, many found a haven of support in the small social groups they belong to on campus that were “cultural” places where they could speak Creole or Patois comfortably. Still, many spoke of being made to feel like outsiders because they were not included in classroom activities, embraced in ways they felt were genuine and real, invited to participate in social activities outside of class or actively recruited for study groups with their white classmates.

Alex Haley mentioned his distrust of whites in the past, which was more like a reaction to an expectation of racism from all whites. He said, “I just didn’t want to be around any white people. I didn’t trust them. They got that devil in them. I didn’t trust them.” During his interview, his position softened as he discussed those whites who are family members and those close to him as friends and colleagues. He said his experiences with whites have changed over time. He admitted to the power of education and how the feelings he had in the past have changed because of positive interactions with a number of whites over the years.

Amiri Baraka said that the notion of white superiority was a real burden, coupled with the acts of racism, and the assumption of Black inferiority. “Racism is like [having] a group of runners on a track and one of them has a 50 pound weight around his neck and you are like – run! Even if you remove the weight, he is still tired, exhausted from what he was carrying. He’s been carrying that weight so long, he is tired!”

#### Theme: Criminality

The assumption that Black males are predisposed to react to situations with violence and rage is tied into stereotypes about their criminality (Sue, 2011). The fear they inspire was evident in some of the accounts study participants shared about how they are treated by professors, law enforcement officials, and employers. Ed Bullins said that many times he has been angry in situations and said you have to “swallow your pride” in order to survive. It is interesting to note that none of the study participants saw violence as an option in responding to racial microaggressions, though they did see their anger as being legitimate. “Once you retaliate,” Bullins said, “you are the one that will be blamed.”

Mindful of how law enforcement officials may profile Black males, he suggested avoiding situations where things might escalate into violence.

Amiri Baraka reported that while driving to Accra Community College when he was in attendance there, “I literally got pulled over at least once a week by the police, on my way to class, sometimes twice a week.” In these situations, he reported that there was no just cause and he would always be free to leave after they would run his license to determine if he had any outstanding warrants. He said these situations would make him feel aggravated, frustrated, and infuriated.

Two participants shared accounts of encounters with transit police officers that occurred while they were students at the community college they attended. While on his way to class, August Wilson reported getting off of the elevator at a downtown subway station and having a detective point a gun at him. He was ordered against the wall and was searched. The officer took his wallet, dumped its contents on the ground, and ordered him to the ground. He was arrested. After he was released, he filed a report against the officer and it was determined he was a victim of racial profiling. He said he was “very, very angry and in a rage.” He said this profiling goes on all the time and that “if the transit police have a bad day, you can be certain some Black man is gonna’ have a bad day as well.”

Langston Hughes spoke of being detained by two white transit police officers who thought his pass was suspicious. He showed them his college ID and told them they did not have a right to touch him. He said they called in four other white transit officers and he was surrounded by the police who took his ID and ran it through their system to determine if he had any outstanding warrants. He said the racial profiling infuriated him,



and he was later released, but he missed a class and was late for another one. He said he was surrounded by the police and put on public display. He later contacted the transit administrators and had the incident investigated. He received a formal apology, but that did nothing to assuage his anger and rage. He said he felt demeaned by being surrounded by the white transit police officers and having people getting on and off the train looking at him like he was a common criminal guilty of a crime. He also shared a story about a tall Black male friend, also a student at Accra Community College, who was taking a photography course and was out for a photo shoot, waiting for other students to arrive. He said a white security officer at Accra Community College came up to him and tried to take the camera away. When the other students arrived and the officer determined it was a legitimate class activity, he gave the Black student his camera back. Hughes says they “always assume the Black man is up to some criminal activity, that the camera was stolen, that it couldn’t possibly belong to him.”

The theme of assumed criminality, cited by Sue as one of the recurring themes in racial microaggression research on Black males, explains the actions taken by the white transit police officers and the campus police officers against these Black men. “A person of color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant based on their race” (Sue, 2010).

Ralph Ellison mentioned the stigma that is attached to being an “African American male is something Caucasian males don’t have to carry.” He cited the large percentage of young Black males who are targeted and unfairly incarcerated. He said, “We have failed.”

As a father, Amiri Baraka says he has to educate his children so they are aware of how Black males are perceived. He fears for his children and tries to prepare them by keeping them mindful and aware of racism. He shared a story about how he spent 13 hours in a jail cell as a kid because he did not have I D on him. He said that though that happened years ago, he will not go out of his house without his I D. He said without his ID, he is a “non-person, perceived as a criminal.” The assumptions of criminality heaped upon these men are not only negotiated in their college experiences, they have to manage them in other aspects of their lives as well. Baldwin noted that he still notices women clutching their handbags as he passes them or people choosing to cross the street rather than share a sidewalk with him. “Even in the college, people pass by you in the corridor, make no eye contact, and act as if you don’t exist,” he said.

Booker T. Washington, having served in the military, had responses that were much more visceral, given his experiences with combat and war. He thinks that it is “horrible that [you] would think of me like this [a criminal]...[and] am I really that f-----d up that you are going to treat me like s---t, pretty much.” His anger, rooted in rage over the assumption of criminality and inferiority, makes him want to retaliate in some way, however, he can’t because he says he is “a caring person.” While at Cape Coast Community College he had encounters with professors who treated him poorly in class because he is assertive and smart. “They would always try to say I was angry if I showed any passion for a topic. That’s f-----d up,” he said. “You *should* be excited about learning.”

The enduring impressions left on the men who had negative encounters with police officers or others who assumed them to be “criminal” are not easily erased or

dismissed. Just as Amiri Baraka will never leave home without his I D, Ernest Gaines said there was a suburban town adjacent to the city he will never go to or drive through because of how he was treated there at a shopping mall and later by white police officers in that town who followed him for no apparent reason. He said he left Accra Community College one day with his cousin to go shopping. After being followed by the white officers, they were stopped and harassed. He shared that they gave them no reason for the detainment, ran their identities through their computer systems, asked them if they had stolen anything and said that they should probably go back to where they came from. He said he was both angry and afraid.

The racial profiling that has been documented in state and federal reports is further evidenced in the experiences of many of the study participants. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke of being stopped on many occasions by white police officers where his initial reaction was “confusion” because “I was obeying all the rules of the road.”

Ten of the fifteen men interviewed for this research expressed “anger” over the overt and violent acts of racism directed toward Blacks. Though they would not retaliate with violence, they felt that there should be stronger laws in place to protect those victimized by hatred and racism. The frustration of being stigmatized as “criminal” seemed to arm them with a “healthy paranoia” that keeps them mindful of the social or public situations they are in, but not so mindful that they are obsessed or detached from social engagement.

## Spirituality: The Response of Choice

It is believed that many internal psychological mechanisms are triggered when a person is the target of a racial microaggression. Though there has not been extensive research done in this area, studies were conducted with Black participants and a racially mixed group that yielded compiled data that summarized a *process* in the microaggression paradigm (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). The complexities of human interaction cannot be minimalized and condensed into exhaustive pockets of categories. The process model presented by Sue and his team is used to guide our understanding of what occurs when Black males encounter racial microaggressions. Incidents may or may not involve personal interactions. In some cases the incidents may be passive. What is important to this research is how Black males perceive what is happening in these situations. After the *incident* occurs, the recipient may spend some time making an assessment of the situation to determine whether it was racially motivated. This may not always be the case, but it is important to note that in interracial encounters, the race issue may be considered by all parties. In this second phase, the recipient is sorting through his *perceptions* of the cues and signals to assess and determine cause and intention. In the next phase, *reaction processes*, there may be a verbal or behavioral action to the offending incident. The fourth phase of the process involves extracting *meaning* from the event and trying to *interpret* what it means for the individual who was the target. The messages from the event that are constructed in the mind of the recipient will assist him in making assessments that will help him maintain his stability and value as a person. It is during this phase that self-reflection and self-healing may be employed to manage the impact of

what occurred. During this phase, the spiritual grounding the recipient has may influence how he manages what has occurred. In the final phase, *consequences and impact*, the effects of the offending event may not be felt immediately. In this research, many Black males recounted events from the past that influenced how they felt about whites and racism in the present. This supports Sue's process model because it addresses the cumulative effect of racial microaggressions on the personal lives of those who have experienced them.

The utility of spirituality in the lives of the Black males who encounter racial microaggressions was the focus of this research. Spirituality and spiritual development is important to the lives of those attending college (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). It has been shown to impact their education, the meaning they derive from their lives, and their commitment to issues of social justice and racial understanding (Kazanjian, 2005; Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). Many of the Black males who attended a community college who were involved in this research shared their thoughts and feelings about how racial microaggressions made them feel and how their spiritual orientation served them when they had to manage these encounters. Important to this study is what was extracted from the interview data. The section on emerging themes will explore the topics that emerged from the data that provide insight into how a spiritual grounding can mitigate against the painful and damaging effects of offending racial microaggressions.

Many of the subjects interviewed for this research discussed how having to confront racial microaggressions has changed them over time. Many reported, as did Alex Haley, that they were cautious when dealing with white people. They reported that their experiences made them examine situations more carefully. Martin reported having

evolved over time to the point where he is more comfortable in racially mixed situations whereas in the past he felt whites were always looking at him to see if he fit some stereotype they had about Black men. All of the Black men studied for this research made a direct connection between racial microaggressions, their responses to them, and their spiritual grounding.

Richard Wright was raised Pentecostal but defined himself as a “spiritualist.” He says he meditates and this keeps him grounded. His spirituality helps him connect with his life purpose which he felt is connected to helping others. He said his spirituality is expressed in how he treats people. He greets strangers, he says, with the same warmth he extends when he greets his friends.

Ernest Gaines was raised as a Jehovah’s Witness and was always told that all he has to do is pray to God and he will “deal with those people who need to be dealt with.” He said that every time he prayed to God something good happened. August Wilson, who described himself as a Christian, said that he prays and trusts that “God has a plan; Jesus Christ is my savior and I rely on him. And when things do not go according to how they should go, I reach out to him.” He said that his strength comes from Jesus and his life purpose is connected to giving back to the Black community.

Ed Bullins, who was raised Catholic, was exposed to three other religious traditions by his mother. He was sent to the Salvation Army for religious grounding, as well as the Baptist church and Kingdom Hall for Jehovah’s Witnesses. He said he draws on each of these traditions for his spiritual grounding and, though he does not have a church family, he meditates and prays.

Langston Hughes was raised in a religious family and says he is honest to a fault. He says that we must do right and stay on the right path. He said his spirituality provides him with hope, “knowing there is something better, something to look forward to.” He spoke of his grandfather, a man who puts everything in God’s hands. His spiritual grounding was tied to his commitment to his family and their health and well-being. When he lost a newborn child a few years back, he relied on his faith for the strength he needed to endure the pain of the loss. He credited his religious foundation with providing him the strength he needed early in his life.

Countee Cullen was raised Catholic and Christian but had no formal church community that he was committed to. He said he prays and reads Scripture when he is alone. When confronted with life’s challenges, he said he always thinks of what a righteous man would do. A self-described optimist, he said his spirituality provided him with “enlightenment, happiness, and the power to help those who are around me.”

The complexities of a religious commitment are evidenced in Baldwin’s construction of his religious orientation. He has drawn from the traditions (Buddhist, Islamic, Judaic, Christian) of those who are around him and he is “hoping that the next phase of his life will include” more spirituality. He said he wants to become a better person and that his spirituality provided him with peace and hope. He said it is his moral compass. He said that prayer helps if it is paired with discussions about spirituality and religion. He said he had been thinking of attending a church so that he can hone his commitment to his community and to those in his personal life.

A spiritual grounding or a strong religious orientation can provide an individual with the resources they need to persevere when the challenges seem insurmountable and

the choices are few. In the cultural context of the Black church as a strong force in the community, resilience can be socialized (Haight, 1998). The character building aspects of religious and spiritual commitments can provide individuals with methods for coping, assigning meaning to their experiences and the lessons they learn from them (Chickering, 2006; Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011).

Questions about the participants' responses to the racial microaggressions were designed to find out *what they thought, felt, and did when the incidents occurred*.

Alex Haley told the story of a professor he had at Accra Community College who kept referring to him as a "boy" and telling him he was proud of him, telling him he was "a good boy." Alex said he was surprised and that it "upset" him. He took no real action and attempted to change the tone of the microaggressions by telling the professor, "I am proud of you, too, old man." He said he tried to use humor and a clever retort to awaken the professor to his insensitivity, but he really did not do anything because, as he said, "I have God with me."

Amiri Baraka shared that having dealt with microaggressions for many years he had come to accept that the problem is so large that "there is not a lot you can do." He said that when he was president of the Black Student Association at Accra Community College and the group was referenced as "just a bunch of n-----s," he felt sad. He said he has learned to work with and around racism. He said as a believer in a Higher Power, he has to do the right thing; the right thing for him is not responding to racial microaggressions with anger, violence, or rage.

August Wilson shared that he was "angry and insulted" when he was referred to as a "boy" by a white female professor. He confronted the professor and she apologized



to him and he “bounced back,” as he put it. He said, “Jesus Christ is my Savior and I rely on Him.” He said that he trusts that God has a plan the trusts that “everything will work out for the goodness and the glory of Him.” As with all of the men in this study, he places his care in the hands of God or a Higher Power. Even with his encounter with the white transit police, he felt his anger was legitimate and his prayer to God was “the right thing to do.”

Booker T. Washington said that when confronted with racial microaggressions he felt “inadequate” and tended to “withdraw.” While at Cape Coast Community College he said he was treated differently by teachers in the classroom, but he did not really respond or act out. He said he would always ask, “What would Jesus do?” and he would have “compassion for those” who were, sadly, living with the “agony of racism in their souls.”

Countee Cullen said that his encounters with racial microaggressions were very unsettling. They would make him feel “miserable” if he chose to respond, but he said he was positive and bounced back by being “an optimist” and trusting that “God will bring a brighter day.” He said, “I try to do the best I can for now because I know we all have a purpose.”

Ed Bullins said that racial microaggressions can be as subtle as a “you people” comment or as blatant as an act of racial violence. He said that microaggressions upset him but he used his “spirituality as a protector” so he does not internalize the negative effects.

Ernest Gaines recalled having a white female professor who “could not look at me.” He said this made him “angry” and “to be honest, it made me upset.” His spirituality

serves him well, he said, because he does not let these kinds of things get him down. He said he can't let these things keep him from his goals.

#### The Meaning of Life and Believing.

Alex Haley believed that God gives his life meaning. This meaning was connected to being able to confront the realities of life clearly, knowing what was "real" and who was "real." This reality he spoke of was connected to being honest and genuine. He believed his spirituality provided him with a sense of purpose and direction, guiding him to learn from his experiences and to blossom as a human being. For Amiri Baraka, this direction and reality was connected to knowing that God is there, and you are not alone. He said that the grounding he gets from his spirituality has given him the energy he needed to endure and move beyond the moment. He said, "It is like rain; it may bother you in the moment, but you have to endure and push through it."

August Wilson connected his life meaning to his devotion to Jesus as his Savior. This devotion was "nurtured by being a loving human being towards all people." This devotion was also expressed in the way "I walk and talk," he offered. This love of God and his spirituality provided him with a goal, a purpose in life that "I am still seeking; I believe my purpose is to help other human beings."

For many of the participants, giving up or submitting to those who offend them with racial microaggressions is not an option. They spoke of prayer and meditation as strategies that help them to stay focused, giving them the energy they need to barrel

through the obstacles and challenges. Baldwin said his spirituality provided him with peace and hope.

Alex Haley believed that being a Muslim has brought a powerful dimension and meaning to his life. He said that “I know the devil side will try to get you to your old self, but I look to the teachings of the Prophet, and I thank God.” Amiri Baraka held that “the greatest trick the devil pulled is convincing the world he did not exist.” He saw his life as having meaning, extracted from religious teachings, that helped him to recognize both good and evil. While he saw the meaning of his life connected to his career choices and the Christian and Islamic beliefs that we should give back, Alex Haley attributed the teachings of the Koran to the strong foundation that guides his life and gives it meaning. He said he has become more observant over the years and has learned to apply Koranic teachings to his life. August Wilson saw his life purpose and meaning being tied into “helping other human beings.”

James Baldwin saw himself as an individual who brought meaning to his life through his involvement with people of many different faiths. He said he “takes a little bit from everyone and weaves it together” to create meaning that is connected to our common humanity. He believed that his spirituality has him on a new path, a new road that will help him to be “a bit more focused and in tune with a Higher Power that” will lead him to others who share his beliefs. While Booker T. Washington saw his life’s purpose as connected to being an effective and loving parent, he also believed that he needs to improve his faith by having his actions demonstrate his religious commitment. He believed that the caring and love he shares with his children should be generalized to

everyone he comes in contact with. He called this being “a man of my faith.” He says he works to have a positive outlook and that “you can be a good person all the time.”

Ed Bullins believed respect was key. He says that even if he does not like someone, he will respect that person. As with Countee Cullen, he knew his life has a purpose and a meaning and he saw it tied into helping those around him. Both men spoke of the morality that is connected to knowing “what is right and wrong” and acting on those principles that are common to religious teachings. Ernest Gaines submits to God, knowing that his life has meaning and trusting that things will “turn out well.” As is true with all of the subjects in this research, he felt that his submission to God, as he puts it, “plants seeds of goodness, bringing peace and hope to my life that is rooted in faith.” These men spoke with a certainty that moved their commitment beyond any suggestion of a “blind trust” in God. They all are guided by their faith and commitment to their spirituality.

All of the study participants were raised in some formal religious orthodoxy that they have since either abandoned or modified. This early religious grounding provided a foundation and a belief system that connected them to God or a Higher Power early in their lives. Ed Bullins said that “Something, someone is watching what I do. What I do reflects who I am.” Langston Hughes believed that he stays on the right path because he is guided by a spiritual energy that is powerful and divine. He says this belief provides him with “hope, knowing there is something better.”

Frederick Douglass saw his life as a part of a divine infinity that should have us focused on “the next generation [because] what you do today, you do for the next generation.” As with Ed Bullins, he focused on respect and doing “good.” Like Alex

Haley, he spoke of the challenges of being human and how we may be tested at times with situations that could possibly turn volatile. He said, “You are here to be as good as possible.”

#### The God Connection and Transcendence.

The power of God or a Higher Power as a life force that propels people to act and to flourish is evident in the way study participants constructed God and transcendence in their lives. Participants felt that the God force always projects into the future, ensuring that “there is something better,” as Langston Hughes expressed it. Martin Luther King, Jr. said that he believes that “God has great things in store for me.” This transcendent projection into the future inspires hope and sparks motivation. It can rile against those forces that might steer someone off track. King said that “every step that I am taking now is all part of the divine plan for me and all part of the process to help me get to whatever the end goal is going to be.” He said that at “an early age, I was well aware that there is a Higher Power at work.” This power provides comfort for many of these men, knowing that they are protected and shielded from harm because God or a Higher Power is always at work on their behalf.

Martin Luther King, Jr., said that “I truly believe that my path is already written, and I’m already traveling down the path.” Booker T. Washington said he has made a commitment to improve his faith and to have this show in his actions. His projection toward the future and future actions is rooted in the connection to God that transcends the moment.

The transcendent experience for many of the study participants involved them devoting their lives and their energies to actions and activities that will benefit others. This move from self to others is a part of the transcendent experience that is the foundation of religious and spiritual experiences that move individuals beyond self and into God and others.

The commitment to God can take one on a selfless journey that fosters a commitment to helping others. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated that:

At the end of the day, I truly believe that what I will be doing later in life in some form or fashion is going to allow me to give back to not only those who have helped me along the way, but the community itself, to help, to uplift young brothers and sisters, and to show them that the impossible is possible.

For Paul Laurence Dunbar, the religious or spiritual experience is transcendent because it helped him to “get through” so he does not have to “internalize things.” The same is true for Ralph Ellison who believed that “whatever happens happens and [you must] go on and move [through] the present into the future.” The commitment to transcend the moment can provide these men with a healthy way to detach from the stresses that could influence their performance in school or the choices they could make if confronted with negative challenges. As Richard Wright stated, and the literature on spirituality supports, a connection to God and others helps you “realize you are not alone in the struggle” (Delgado, 2005; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Chatters, 1994).

## What the Research Revealed: Embedded Themes

Race and racism are important to any discussion of Black students attending higher education institutions in America (Foster, 2005; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). As this study explored the utility of spirituality for Black males who attended a community college who were confronted with racial microaggressions, data reveal recurring themes that provide insight into the strategies used by these men, informed by their spirituality, that help them to move beyond the stresses produced by the racial microaggressions. This section explores the themes that were embedded in the discourse on spirituality, with spirituality as the umbrella tool for managing the challenges and obstacles that emerge when confronted with racial microaggressions.

In this research, an interpretive approach allowed for meanings to emerge from the interviews and from relationships and connections made between and across subjects (Angen, 2000; Berger, 1967; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This positivist approach, with its focus on the sensory experiences of the students under study, provided an understanding of how Black males constructed their spirituality when confronted with racial microaggressions.

There were general themes and responses that were similar across subjects. Anger, for example, was the initial visceral response most subjects had to racial microaggressions. This intersubjectivity, the shared feelings and definitions of the realities of confronting racial microaggressions, was an important element in highlighting the common experiences these Black males shared and the responses they selected (Gillespie & Cornish, 2010).

Examining the responses of these Black men uncovered some notable and important themes and findings that speak to how they cope and how they infuse their spirituality into their construction of “race” realities. Among these themes are: compassion, empathy, and forgiveness; resilience, perseverance, and persistence; God, family, and community; intelligence as a coping strategy; educations as a key to freedom and liberation; and visibility and invisibility as contradictory constructs employed by microaggressors when coming in contact with Black males.

#### Compassion, Empathy, and Forgiveness.

When asked about racists and the acts of violence they visit upon people of color, Frederick Douglass said, “I feel sorry for them.” Similarly, Booker T. Washington said, “I feel bad for them.” This compassion was evident throughout this research. James Baldwin said he felt “sad for these people.” With each study participant who offered words of compassion or empathy, there was an understanding of the reality of racism and its seeming permanence in American society, but the shift from victim to steward of peace revealed the power these men assumed as they stood up against these oppressive forces.

Langston Hughes said that “everybody is worthy” and their value as a human being should not be abandoned because they are racist. Countee Cullen simply said, “God help them.” These words and statements of depth of feeling suggest a common humanity that is rooted in a common struggle to do better and be better. Amiri Baraka was not as generous with his feelings. He said he didn’t see how he could have compassion for someone who would not admit they have a problem. He tied his comments to the broader



oppression Black people face in America, commenting on what has happened to him personally while chronicling the history of the oppression of Blacks in America.

Ed Bullins said he respects everyone even if he does not like them. This respect, tied into his religious upbringing, anchors him and protects him. It provides him with distance from others so that he can shield himself from possibly being hurt by racial microaggressions. Ernest Gaines placed the responsibility for racism in the hands of those who are racist and said, repeatedly, that “God will deal with it; let God deal with it.”

To pardon or excuse someone who intends to harm you in some way is considered a noble and generous act. Tied into many religious and spiritual traditions, many of the Black men in this research chose to forgive rather than carry the burden of repressed anger and rage. For them, forgiveness is a divine option granted by God. Many felt that if they chose to act violently, they would be punished by legal authorities and also by a Higher Power. They also felt that those who use racial microaggressions would be punished in some way, but they do not see the punishment as their duty. Their spirituality informs them that violence yields no positive results and runs counter to what they feel (compassion) and believe (faith). Martin Luther King, Jr., said he felt comfortable with forgiving, especially with those persons who have taken the time to educate themselves and come to terms with the mistakes they have made.

August Wilson said he has a forgiving heart and prays for those who are racist while working to be the best person he can be. Richard Wright said he places himself in a place of forgiveness, but he has to first let the person that racism should not be tolerated. He went on to explain that his kindness allows him to be forgiving, but not tolerant.

Countee Cullen offered, plainly, that he forgives those people [who are racist]. Langston Hughes felt you have to forgive them because this is God's way. James Baldwin said that forgiveness brings him peace and allows him an opportunity to move on. He felt that if you dwell on what has happened to you, you become mired in something that will weigh you down and create sadness and pain. Booker T. Washington's response was similar to Baldwin's and he noted that if you don't forgive, you end up hurting yourself.

The complexities associated with embracing someone who has harmed you is rooted in many of the stories and teachings of the Bible, according to the study participants who referred to "Scripture." The grace associated with forgiveness is viewed as a blessing from God, according to Scripture. Alex Haley, who converted to Islam, said "it is weird" that "some of the people who have been helping me out have been white." The helpful actions of those he considered his oppressors challenge his construction of whiteness and his expectations around the behaviors he should expect and anticipate from them. He further shares his love for his sister-in-law, who is white. What he shared sheds light on the psychological and emotional dissonance created by the messages received from racial microaggressions, and the challenges Black males must face as they process the occurrences. As Haley ferrets through his feelings and thoughts, he said that "When I see a white person, I can't say I hate you because you are white." He also spoke of an incident that occurred when he was a child, walking with his father when a white woman charged forth, ordering her dog to attack his father. The woman was laughing while the dog was biting his father, who was trying to shield and protect him from harm. He was later puzzled that his father forgave the woman by saying, "She just didn't know any

better.” He said there was a lesson of compassion and forgiveness in that experience the he has never forgotten. When he encounters racial microaggressions, he said he tries to model the lessons he learned from his father and his religious and spiritual teachings.

The compassion connected to spirituality was evident in James Baldwin’s belief that forgiveness “allows me to move...it gives me some kind of peace.” Countee Cullen stated, flatly, that “I forgive those people who are racist. God help them.” To have compassion and forgiveness as one considers the atrocities of slavery, the growing incarceration rate of Black males in America and the disturbing demographics that define the current state of Black males is a testament to the power of faith and spirituality in the lives of these men. Frederick Douglass claimed he smiles when confronted with racial microaggressions where he is expected to respond with violence. He says he is “violent in a good way,” suggesting that his nonviolence is more powerful than a physical act of violence. Langston Hughes said that when he was harassed by the transit police, “I felt sorry for them.” This sorrow and compassion was linked to his feeling that they were sadly mistaken about who he is as a person, and the fact that they are mired in a belief system that is racist and unfair places them in the vulnerable position.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said that those who victimize others with racial microaggressions are “sick and need help.” He shared, in detail, his feelings about those who hate.

I truly believe that there is something beyond what we see on the surface that is at work, either internally with each individual or within their family and how these people are raised. We’re not born to hate, and so this is something that has developed. We just are not brought into the world to hate others like that.

In dealing with the reality of racism and racial microaggressions, King cited “ignorance” as one of the causes and offered that he is empathic because it is “sad” to see people wasted their lives this way. Ed Bullins said he has compassion for those who are racist because they are “stupid” and they were “educated in the wrong way.”

Resilience, Perseverance, and Persistence.

Mindful of the fact that community colleges have rules and guidelines that govern expectations about how students should behave, the Black men interviewed for this research used strategies and tools that provided them with the support they needed as they managed racial microaggressions. Many remained focused on their goals and were resilient because they thought about those who had endured the brutal slavery that lasted for nearly three hundred years. Frederick Douglass said, “giving up is not an option.” He said that if a people can endure slavery and survive, then “anything is possible.” Amiri Baraka said it is in his “spirit” not to quit or give up. He said his will and determination keeps him focused on his goals and he cannot let the challenges deter him.

Booker T. Washington admitted to using illegal substances in the past that would help him cope with the pain of trying to manage too many obstacles at once. He has chosen a different path and now embraces his spirituality as a tool for resilience. He uses meditation as a tool for persistence, relying on his faith and his actions to keep him focused on his goals.

James Baldwin spoke of his deceased mother and how he feels she is looking down on him and providing him with the strength he needs to persevere. He says he knows he is not the issue, “the issue is those other people [who are racist].” Countee

Cullen referred to himself as an optimist and said he sees everything as a learning experience and trusts that tomorrow will be better.

Modeling his behavior and commitment after the Prophets, Alex Haley said that if the Prophets and their messengers went “through a hundred times worse than what I have gone through, I got to be able to bounce back.” Amiri Baraka also referenced what others have gone through before and survived. In comparing himself to those in history, he said, “You wake up and tell yourself you are going to be the master of your own destiny.” This persistence, grounded in the power of religion and spirituality, guided August Wilson to share that, “I just keep going.” He said that he has to “be the best he can be.” His focus, especially, is connected to his love and trust of Jesus, as he put it.

Ed Bullins credits his mother and his upbringing to giving him the energy to persevere and move through challenges. He said he has learned from everyone because his mother opened her arms to “all people; I grew up in a very diverse household.” He said his experiences have made him stronger. His experiences make him want to “teach the younger generation to retaliate with knowledge.” He explained that education is the armor that Black people need to take into battle when confronting racism and racial microaggressions.

Countee Cullen also focused on education as a fortifying force to mitigate against the stresses of racial microaggressions. His optimism has him looking forward, anticipating and expecting the good because of “God’s grace.” He, too, has a model in his mind of the strong and righteous ancestors who endured tragedy and pain; they provide him with inspiration and give fuel to his optimism.

Frederick Douglass attributed his resilience and persistence to his spirituality, but also to how he has chosen to deal with his challenges and battles. “I fight differently,” he said. “I learned not to react, but to act.” He said that in his efforts to achieve and excel, people expected him to fit into the stereotypes about Black males. Rather than respond to the negative actions that manifested as forms of racial microaggressions, he would stay focused on his goals and not respond in the manners they would expect. Instead, he fought back by doing well and “acting” in a manner that would benefit him. This strategy has worked for him and he has stayed on goal by not being deterred by others who seek to interrupt his path to his personally-defined success.

Ralph Ellison said that he has learned to just “keep trying” and “never give up.” His persistence he attributed to prayer and the guidance he gets from mentors and those who are older that he respects. He also said that by helping others he is helping himself. He also said he has no problem asking for help if he needs it.

Richard Wright said that he stays focused on his goals by thinking of those he loves and cares about. This, coupled with the knowledge of the history of Black Americans and their struggle, keeps him committed, knowing that “anything is possible once you put your mind to it, regardless of the circumstances.” This tenacity can be linked to the knowledge he gleaned from his course work while pursuing a degree in Africana studies. For him it is also connected to the birth and extended families he has created that have given him support and love.

## God, Family, and Community.

In the construction of their spirituality and its utility in their lives, many of the Black men in this study spoke of a commitment to God, family, and community. Countee Cullen said that family helps him stay focused. Raised by an aunt and uncle, education was instilled in him at an early age and it is something he values. Amiri Baraka also made reference to how he was raised and how his commitment to his children keeps him focused and committed. He spoke often of working with young people and how his community is very important to his life and his professional and personal goals.

Richard Wright spoke of Black people working together to inspire each other. He said that his family and friends help him stay focused on what he intends to do with his life and career. This commitment to them and to his community has provided him with inspiration and energy. Ralph Ellison also spoke of a commitment to his community that he thinks should be expressed through educating those who are less fortunate. He spoke of being a role model for those who are marginalized and feel hopeless.

Most of the men interviewed showed an allegiance to their neighborhoods and their communities. Many have chosen career paths that will have them serving the people in the communities where they live. Whether they are teaching, counseling, or managing a business, each mentioned giving back to their community and feeling an obligation to help those who are in need. Tied into the spiritual and religious teachings they received early in life, most of these men made a connection between God, a Higher Power, and their communities. Alex Haley spoke passionately about Black-on-Black crime and how the community needs to be healed. As a Muslim, he said he has turned to Allah and he has turned to his community because it is “his calling.”

Ralph Ellison is seeking a career in criminal justice and his commitment to God and community is expressed in the work he does with young Black men who have been incarcerated or are in life situations that could land them in jail. Citing statistics, he saw crime rates rising and education as a liberating force for young Black men in urban environments. He spoke about the dropout rate in the urban high school he attended and how a sizeable percentage of the young men he went to high school with are currently in jail. He said that he has counseled a few of them who have been released and takes credit for encouraging one to attend college. He said the young man is in college and also has a full time job.

The God presence in the lives of these men is a critical part of their construction of religion and community. They speak of family, God, and community in the same voice, often speaking of a “church community,” a “church family,” or their “hood” as family and community. The strength of these institutions (church, family, and community) provides them with the sustained support that is often referenced in their interview responses. They construct God or a Higher Power as being the sustaining force that is always with them. This might be manifested as the God of their choosing or God as defined in a most expanded sense, encompassing those relatives and ancestors who have crossed over (died), yet still have a strong spiritual presence on the earth plane. They rely on their birth, extended, and fictive families to give them the love, nurturance and grounding they need, knowing they have a “home” to go to. The community is a place of comfort and security for them, a place where they are acknowledged and embraced.



Langston Hughes spoke often of “knowing where I came from” with a sense of pride about his heritage, his family, and his community. Though plagued by crime and decay, he spoke of his neighborhood with an optimism that mirrors his passion for God and his family. Ernest Gaines spoke about his “church family” and God’s goodness. When he prays, he said, good things happen. He found his strength in church, family, and community. He stated, simply, that “I’m into being happy.”

The Black men who participated in this research used their spirituality as a force external to their being that empowered them with the tools they needed to transcend the effects of the racial microaggressions they encountered.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Study Summary

This research was designed to understand the utility of spirituality in situations where Black males encounter racial microaggressions. Given the fact that Black college student demonstrate a fairly high degree of spirituality relative to other college populations and spirituality correlates positively with GPA for this group, Black males who attended a community college were the focus of this study (Dennis, Hicks, Banerjee, & Dennis, 2005; Cannon, Barnett, Righter, Larson, & Barrus, 2005). There has been a growing interest in spirituality and higher education and this study contributes to the new body of research in this area (Kazanjian, 1999; Kazanjian, 2005; Chickering, 2006).

The status of Black males in higher education reflects a growing concern that needs to be addressed. Over a 25 year period, there has been no substantial change in the number of Black men in higher education institutions (Harper, 2005). The challenges Black males face in this country are evident in their high homicide rates, the increase in their incarceration rates, their high unemployment, and the health disparities that place them at high risk for hypertension, diabetes, and cancer. Further, for those Black males who do seek higher education as an outlet for career access and lifestyle options, they are often confronted with challenges that might threaten or jeopardize their success (Preston, 2001; Brown II, 2002).

Racial microaggressions, defined as “*the constant and continuing everyday reality of slights, insults, invalidations, and indignities visited upon marginalized groups by well-intentioned and ill-intentioned people,*” impact their performance and adjustment to college (Sue, 2011; Washington, 1996; Harper and Hurtado, 2007). The racial microaggressions that Black males who attended a community college had to negotiate might impede their full participation in the college experience (Sue and Constantine, 2007; Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2002). Those Black males who have demonstrated a high degree of spirituality might have a quality that mitigates against the effects of racial microaggressions, removing a possible barrier to their success in college. Research has shown that there is a relationship between spirituality and academic success (Walker and Dixon, 2002; Christian and Barbarin, 2001), and since spirituality is such an important component of Black American culture, how it is constructed by Black males who attended a community college will provide insight into its utility for this group. Further, since race is such a powerful and important dynamic in American society (Collins, 2006), it will impact the social relationships Black males have as they negotiate the college campus culture.

The topic of spirituality and Black males who attended a community college is important because it will contribute to our understanding of what Black males need in order to complete college and change the demographics that define their full participation in college and American society in general. If they have the tools they need to hurdle the obstacles before them, they will have access to the elements of the society that will foster their participation as productive citizens.

This study was designed to offer study participants an opportunity to share insights into their college and life experiences and their encounters with racial microaggressions. This study will also contribute to understanding spirituality and its effects. Community colleges in America educate a large percentage of the population and respond to those who seek career training, a certificate in a specialized area of study, or access to a 4-year institution through a transfer program. Community colleges enroll a diverse student population and provide service to low-income and nontraditional students (NCES, 2009). The subjects for this study attended community colleges, accessible by public transportation, in a large metropolitan urban area. It looked at a large population of Black males who had attended a community college and then identified a study group of fifteen Black males who had scored the highest on the Armstrong Measure of Spirituality. This group was then given a series of open-ended questions in an interview format that looked at how they responded to racial microaggressions. The intention of the interviews was also to determine what utility their spirituality had for them when encountering racial microaggressions and how they constructed their spirituality in general and in these situations.

### Summary of Findings

Current and past research on Black males revealed a relationship between spirituality and their performance in college, as already noted. This study brought to light many findings that were embedded in the responses participants had to the interview protocol. Among them:

- *Compassion and empathy* emerged as responses to those perpetrators of racial microaggressions and as reactions to those who are racist signifying the strength of a spiritual orientation as being transforming for victims and creating a respect for the failings of humans as imperfect beings;
- *Forgiveness* was a quality that allowed Black males to free themselves of the pain and agony of internalizing the effects of racial microaggressions. This response was noteworthy because it transforms the victimizer into the victim. Though many did not “pity” those who sought to intentionally or unintentionally harm them, they found a way to forgive them and allow them to retain their dignity as human beings;
- Spirituality provides Black males with the strength and *resilience* they need to *persevere*, push through challenges and obstacles, and stay focused and committed to their goals;
- *Persistence* is linked to spirituality through a firm belief that God or a Higher Power will provide a path for you to follow to help you reach your goals if you don’t give up;
- Spirituality has great utility for providing Black males with solid grounding and a *sense of belonging* that creates stability, consistency, and “community” for them, expanding their construction of “family” to include those who surround them in their homes, their neighborhoods, and their churches, mosques, or spiritual centers.

- Many Black males see themselves as being “invisible” to whites except in those situations where their “visibility” is connected to them being identified as “criminals” or athletes.
- Though not included as a critical part of this research, the intersectionality of race and class are mentioned here to register how “race operates as such an overriding feature of African American experience in the United States that it not only overshadows economic class relations for Blacks, but obscures the significance of economic class with the United States in general” (Collins, 1998, p. 209). Though worthy of study, socioeconomic status (SES) is not a predictor of dropout rates for Blacks (Epps, 1995) and was not considered a critical part of this research.

Many Black males viewed the campus environment as unwelcoming and sometimes hostile. Many felt differential treatment from white professors and attributed this to being considered intellectually inferior or unable to handle the rigors of community college.

There were a number of study participants who felt they were being accused of cheating because of favorable performance that was not expected by their professors. A number of participants mentioned the stresses they had to manage as a result of the assumption of intelligence inferiority. The themes of intelligence inferiority, the inferiority of Blackness, and the assumption of criminality seemed to be overlapping concerns that were often evident in how these Black males were perceived based on their appearance. A few reported sensing that professors were intimidated by what they wore or how they “presented” themselves in both manner and dress.

Another finding focused on the perception many of these Black males had about how they are valued as individuals. Some spoke of professors not being able to look at them or acknowledge their presence.

The visibility/invisibility theme was woven through the accounts about perception. Many Black males felt that they were “invisible” to many whites since they did not look at them or sustain eye contact if they did. This invisibility might be considered a component of the inferiority of Blackness theme since there is no acknowledgement of them as individuals. Their “visibility” comes into focus when there is an attribution to assumed criminality based on physical appearance.

Their spiritual connection to a Higher Power provided them with a self-awareness of their value as human beings. Many spoke of having self-knowledge and knowing God and how these connections brought meaning and purpose to them, especially in situations where they were not regarded or acknowledged.

The meaning these men attach to being recognized is an important finding. They appear sensitive to being recognized for their intellectual achievements and the positive human qualities they possess. They seem motivated to dispel the myths surrounding their intellectual abilities and use this motivation as fuel for their diligence.

Encounters with law enforcement officials led a few participants to label the incidents cases of “racial profiling.” The large majority of Black males who participated in this research reported being “angry” when encountering racial microaggressions. Though they did not “act out” with anger in response, they acknowledged the feelings and the frustration that accompanied them.

The utility of spirituality in the lives of these Black males is evident in their responses to racial microaggressions. The findings support their reliance on spirituality as a tool of support that fosters resilience, encourages forgiveness, and keeps them focused on the Higher Power for guidance and direction. Many embrace faith in a Higher Power that does not require regular church attendance, though they speak of praying and meditating regularly. This faith helps them get through the challenges of life and keep them tenacious in their commitment to achieving their educational goals. In this pool of Black males, many are in their 30s and 40s and still pursuing higher education. This seems to be a testament to the tools they have at their disposal to keep them focused and determined to achieve.

Compassion and forgiveness appeared to provide these men with the peace they need to continue on their journeys. Many did not see violence as an option in responding to racial microaggressions. Interestingly, many felt sorry for the “racists” and hoped they would find their humanity and wisdom.

The commitment to community was apparent in the responses of those Black men who spoke of “giving back” and helping others. There was a focus on family and helping those less fortunate. These findings provide a composite view of how the effects of racial microaggressions can be managed and mitigated for this group of Black males by using the elements of spirituality they have defined for themselves.



## Theoretical Implications

The primary question that guided this research was *how, if at all, does spirituality influence the responses to racial microaggressions of Black males who attended a community college?*

In the Racial Microaggression Process Model (Sue, 2010) those who encounter racial microaggressions move through some internal psychological dynamics that determine how they will respond. After an incident occurs, many Black males would *feel* anger as they expressed in the interviews, however, they would not *act* on the anger. Instead, they would react with whatever their spiritual or religious teachings dictated for them, according to how they constructed their spirituality. For the majority of the men in this study, their spiritual influences were evident in the perception phase of the *incident-perception-reaction-interpretation-consequence sequence* in the Sue model. None reacted with violence, though they felt anger and outrage at the pain the acts caused for them personally. It is important to note that, if they chose, they could have reacted with rage or violence, but they chose not to. In this theoretical model it is also important to note that the consequence of the actions they chose in these situations likely reinforced their commitment to their spirituality because they were able to feel they had done what was right in the moment.

Many of the men mentioned, with wisdom garnered from experience, that they are ever mindful of the injustices that occur for Black males as a result of racial profiling and how they are treated by police officers and law officials. Some recounted the history of slavery and Jim Crow that are real parts of America's legacy, along with the way the government and its agents, be they legal representatives or community college faculty

members paid with tax funds from state-supported institutions, can impede the progress and education of Black males. Though aware of what has happened to other Black males and what could potentially happen to them, being grounded in spirituality gave them a sense of well-being that is connected to what their lives mean for them and how their connection to God or a Higher Power serves them well (Delgado, 2005; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Chatters, 1994).

Spirituality influences their responses by providing them with the psychological and personal strength they need to transform a negative experience into one that will foster their “transcendence” beyond the moment. It gives them the comfort of “knowing” that they are protected and shielded by the power of God or a Higher Power that will carry them forth while keeping them connected to all human beings, even those who are unkind. The study of spirituality and theoretical foundations it constructs and explores informs

The secondary research questions asked *what responses have Black males who attended a community college chosen when confronted with racial microaggressions* and *how do Black males who attended a community college experience their religion or spirituality when confronted with a racial microaggression?* In some situations, Black males have chosen to speak up and to take action when a racial microaggression occurs. Being proactive, it seems, provided them with an opportunity to help change a bad situation and make things easier for those who would come after them. Many of the study participants spoke of relatives, friends, historical and religious figures who had endured hard times and survived. They also made references to religious stories that offered guiding wisdoms for them to follow and embrace. When confronted with racial

microaggressions, their religion or spirituality reminds them and informs them that they must do what is right according to the guidance of the teachings. Again, this does not discount them taking charge and speaking to an injustice. For some, speaking out is connected to their religious or spiritual grounding because it parallels the work of Biblical figures, followers of the Prophet, and is in line with the social justice commitment that is one of the philosophical foundations of the Black church.

The important work of Astin, Astin, & Lindholm (2011) explored the inner lives of college students and looked at their spiritual growth as a whole during their college years. Answers to many of the existential questions posed for this research were grouped around the ten main measures of spirituality they defined for their study (charitable involvement, spiritual quest, ecumenical worldview, ethic of caring, equanimity, religious struggle, religious commitment, religious/social conservatism, religious skepticism, and religious engagement). A number of the findings from this research have relevance and support for what was revealed in this study of Black males who attended a community college.

The spiritual quest measure they used in their study focused on how engaged students are in creating a meaningful life. In this research on Black males, Alex Haley, August Wilson, and James Baldwin all connected their life journey to finding meaning and purpose that is connected to developing those traits that speak to a focus on God and a common humanity. Astin, Astin, & Lindholm (2011) found that those students who scored high on the spiritual quest measure also tended to show caring and an interest in understanding others. Also noteworthy is their finding that “growth in spiritual quest enhances the students’ intellectual self-esteem (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011, p. 135).

Recognizing that a definition of spirituality must be multifaceted, they include a “sense of caring and compassion...with a lifestyle that includes service to others...[and a] sense of calm and centeredness, especially in times of stress” as being key elements (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011, p. 137). These elements are evident in the findings of this research on Black males. The focus on forgiveness, coupled with a commitment to prayer and meditation, provided many with the grounding they needed to manage racial microaggressions and their accompanying stresses.

Exploring the construction of a highly spiritual person yielded “equanimity” as a measure of spirituality and religiousness that is defined as being peaceful, directed, optimistic, grateful, and able to find meaning in times of hardship (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011, P. 50). Importantly, the research posits that equanimity “allows” a person to direct anger into activities and actions considered positive (p. 52). For Black males who encountered racial microaggressions, their spirituality empowered them to make choices rooted in optimism, allowing them the peace and centeredness they needed to transcend the negative possibilities.

### Practice Implications

Given the fact that Black males are not accessing higher education and are not persisting if they do, this study offers some insight into some of the challenges that might compound their struggles as they seek higher education. Educators and policy makers could benefit from data that identify the factors that contribute to and explain the low graduation rates for Black males at community colleges and four-years institutions (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). The stereotypes that have come to identify Black males may

affect their motivation to achieve and to commit to pursuing and completing a higher education degree (Sue, 2010; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2002; Museus, 2008).

Community colleges should consider creating learning communities for Black males so they have the spiritual support systems they need to help them be successful. Having worked in the community college system for nearly three decades, I have explored many strategies and options both in and out of the classroom that might be beneficial to Black males who have been challenged by those factors that can impede and inhibit their progress. Learning communities were institutionalized at the community college where I am tenured and their success has been touted, especially for those groups that have historically been unsuccessful. Under a Title III grant, the community college piloted learning community seminars with a focus on helping students to excel in their studies as demonstrated by high GPAs and to show persistence by returning semester-to-semester, year to year. The learning community seminar I designed for urban males, targeting Black and Latino males, has had tremendous success (BHCC data). The semester to semester return rate has been 92 percent for males in the seminar as compared to 62 percent for the college overall. In addition, the GPAs for males in the two seminar classes has hovered around an average of 3.2. These demographics, recorded by the college, show the positive effects of learning communities on the performance of those male students enrolled in these seminars, especially since the large percentage of males enrolled in these seminars were males of color. Since many of the learning communities have a focus on personal and spiritual development, their success with marginalized populations is noteworthy.

Community colleges should create college and community links through service learning and civic engagement. Those Black males who have been successful in college have been engaged in the college experience above and beyond attending classes; participation in the college experience matters (Harper, 2012). The linkages that could be made to connect Black males to their communities might mirror the commitments the Black men in this research noted as they spoke of “giving back” to their communities. These opportunities for service and engagement might fill the voids felt by those Black males who are not fully embraced or included in the activities of the community colleges they attend. By embracing a pedagogy/andragogy that fosters community and spiritual well-being, these institutions would be shadowing the structure of the Black church where there is an emphasis on fellowship, community, and family. This can be done by sponsoring forums and workshops that teach ways to be successful in college. The values instilled in the lives of those who attend church regularly or did at some point in their lives, appear to persist over time and are accessible to those who are committed to their faith. Evidence of the transforming effects of religion and spirituality can be seen in this research as a mitigating force that provides Black males with the strength they need to counter the effects of racial microaggressions. Creating a sense of community through civic involvement and service might create a powerful bridge between the community college and the Black community.

Community colleges should create more partnerships with Black churches and religious organizations in Black communities to foster and cement a commitment to higher education that may parallel the spiritual commitment of its members. The Black church alliances that exist in most cities with sizable Black populations exists in the

geographical area under study. One of its chief missions is to bring together, under one umbrella, all of the churches, regardless of religious orientation, that serve the Black community. They have a focus on education, service, fellowship, youth, and spiritual development, among other charges. The partnerships already exist with school systems and colleges and can be strengthened with new programs that encourage college attendance and completion, academic skills development, and the pursuit of degree and certificate programs for career development. Many of the churches in Black communities already have computer classes, tutoring classes, and after school programs for youth. To create programs for prospective community college students could easily fit into the programs the churches offer, especially since many of them have the space to house such programs.

Community colleges should realize the institutional value of doing case studies on racial microaggressions so they can better understand the demographics that define their male students. The Black men who participated in this research provided insight into some of the challenges they have to confront as they pursue a higher education and manage racial microaggressions. Case studies can provide information about the problems and concerns that may be peculiar to the institution under study. This unique feature might offer an opportunity to identify targeted problem areas so that solutions are focused.

#### Implications for Future Research

This research on Black males who attended a community college opens many doors and opportunities to explore the topics under study. In addition to exploring how

spirituality might influence responses to racial microaggressions, there are opportunities to design research.

Researchers should disaggregate Black males as a group to explore the impact of the cultures and subcultures of Blacks on definitions of spirituality. To view Black males as a monolithic group is to ignore the rich diversity of Blacks born in one of the more than 50 countries of Africa, those born in Europe and Asia, the natives of the islands of the Caribbean, those born to the cultures of South America, and the regional differences that may further define Blacks born in the United States and Canada.

Research on Black males who score low on measurements of spirituality and religion should be done so that comparative studies can be considered. Given the fact that we are living in a global village, there is room to study the dimensions of religion and spirituality, as they exist in other cultures.

Comparative studies on spirituality and males from other ethnic groups could prove enlightening and beneficial. Given the creeping crime statistics and incarceration rates for new male immigrants, studies that look at the influences of spirituality could provide information that could inform policies that focus on intervention and crime prevention. Creating bridges between community colleges and urban communities could empower many groups marginalized by poverty, unemployment, poor education, and a lack of access to the institutions that could empower them and change their lives.

Community colleges should consider forming partnerships with the many churches in the Black community and engage everyone in fundraising drives to address critical social issues such as homelessness, health disparities, educational access,



unemployment, and underemployment. Engaging colleges and churches in civic activities creates a commitment to community that is inclusive, obligating both institutions to share in the successes and failures. These partnerships are built on creating a “spirit” for change that addresses what many of the study participants saw as an important ingredient of their spirituality – giving back to the community.

In practice, a bridge between civic responsibility and spirituality could be created by community colleges that sponsor spiritual awareness seminars in collaboration with the many churches that populate Black neighborhoods. By focusing on creating bridges to education and success rather than barriers, community colleges and churches would better serve those Black males who seek to change their lives by embracing the utility of education and spirituality. For many Black males in this study, a commitment to community was an element they tied into their spirituality. The responsibility for changing social conditions in their communities and the lives of younger people blended into their spiritual commitment. Churches provide millions of Black Americans with a place of worship, a spiritual home, and a support network to address personal and civic concerns (Sanders, 1998).

## APPENDIX A

### ARMSTRONG MEASURE OF SPIRITUALITY

The Armstrong Measure of Spirituality (AMOS) was chosen for this research because it was specifically developed for a Black American population by Tonya D. Armstrong. Because it takes into account cultural differences, it is more inclusive in how it constructs spirituality. Other instruments and measures of spirituality target key religious areas specifically (for example, church attendance or tithing) and do not always take into account cultural issues and concerns (Hill & Hood, 1999). The AMOS explores four key areas:

<b>Spiritual Characteristics</b>	Personal traits and qualities
<b>Spiritual Beliefs</b>	Faith and a commitment to God/ Higher Power
<b>Religious Experiences</b>	Connection to a Higher Power and others
<b>Spiritual Actions</b>	Demonstrated acts of faith or compassion

## ARMSTRONG MEASURE OF SPIRITUALITY (AMOS)

Instructions: Please rate your agreement or disagreement with each of these statements on a scale from 1 to 5. If you strongly disagree with a statement, for example, circle “1”. If you agree with a statement but not strongly, circle “4”. While various references to God have been made (such as Supreme Being or Higher Power), you are encouraged to substitute your preferred term. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. God is powerful enough to accomplish anything.	1	2	3	4	5
2. It is important to help those in need.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I become impatient easily.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Prayer is an important aspect of my life.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have never had a conversion experience.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I am not able to keep my patience in most challenging situations.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My life is serving a particular purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
8. It is not possible for me to love someone.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I do not worry much.	1	2	3	4	5

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
10. Even without the help of a Higher Being, I feel that I am strong enough to accomplish anything.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I believe in miracles.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Regardless of external circumstances, I can be joyful within.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I do not participate in worship services on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4	5
14. A kind gesture toward a stranger is worth the effort.	1	2	3	4	5
15. In many ways, my life is nearly hopeless.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I can put mu trust in a Higher Being.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I have never been healed by supernatural forces.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Even in tempting situations, I can usually control myself.	1	2	3	4	5
19. My body is a space in which God dwells and should therefore be kept clean/cleansed.	1	2	3	4	5
20. The Golden Rule (doing to others as you would like them to do to you) no longer applies in today's society.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I have been at peace with myself for a long time.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I do not believe in the existence of a Supreme Being.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I have experienced a vision.	1	2	3	4	5
24. My mood seems to change like the weather.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Reading the holy writings of my faith on a regular basis is fundamental to my beliefs.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Because of my faith, I feel a responsibility for the well being of others.	1	2	3	4	5

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
27. With all the events going on in my life, it is impossible to find peace within.	1	2	3	4	5
28. I have an intimate relationship with God.	1	2	3	4	5
29. My life does not serve any particular purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I am faithful that things will get better in the world.	1	2	3	4	5
31. God doesn't use ordinary people like me to accomplish any particular purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
32. It is important to love everyone, friends and enemies alike.	1	2	3	4	5
33. It really annoys me when I don't get the credit I deserve.	1	2	3	4	5
34. A Supreme Force uses me for His/Her purposes.	1	2	3	4	5
35. I have had a conversion experience.	1	2	3	4	5
36. I have not been at peace with myself for a long time.	1	2	3	4	5
37. When trying to accomplish goals in my life, I feel that a Higher Being supports me.	1	2	3	4	5
38. It is hard enough for me to provide for myself and my family without having to be concerned about other's needs.	1	2	3	4	5
39. I worry a lot.	1	2	3	4	5
40. I am enabled by a Higher Power to carry out life's duties.	1	2	3	4	5
41. I have been healed by supernatural forces.	1	2	3	4	5
42. I often feel a warm, inner glow.	1	2	3	4	5
43. God has existed since the beginning of time, and always will.	1	2	3	4	5
44. I do not feel obligated to show love toward everyone.	1	2	3	4	5
45. I rarely have joyful moments.	1	2	3	4	5
46. I receive support from a Higher Being.	1	2	3	4	5

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
47. I have heard God in an audible voice.	1	2	3	4	5
48. It is difficult for me to have hope when I see all the terrible things happening in the world.	1	2	3	4	5
49. There exists a Supreme Being who knows all things.	1	2	3	4	5
50. More often than not, I am upset or disturbed about the way things are going in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
51. I do not believe that it is possible to adopt a joyful attitude most of the time.	1	2	3	4	5
52. People should be treated fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
53. I do not feel that I can put my trust in a Higher Being.	1	2	3	4	5
54. I am able to keep my patience in most challenging situations.	1	2	3	4	5
55. I have never experienced a vision.	1	2	3	4	5
56. Those who say they have heard God in an audible voice are out of touch with reality.	1	2	3	4	5
57. Knowing that God supports me helps me feel secure.	1	2	3	4	5
58. The Supreme Force in the world is not interested in my problems	1	2	3	4	5
59. I do not feel that a kind gesture toward a stranger is worth the effort.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B

FLYER FOR PARTICIPANTS

BLACK MALES WHO HAVE  
ATTENDED A COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
NEEDED TO VOLUNTEER FOR AN  
IMPORTANT RESEARCH STUDY ON  
SPIRITUALITY AND RACIAL  
MICROAGGRESSIONS

THIS RESEARCH IS CONFIDENTIAL:

YOU WILL NOT BE IDENTIFIED BY NAME

PLEASE CALL 617-228-2497 OR

EMAIL: [lsjohnson@bhcc.mass.edu](mailto:lsjohnson@bhcc.mass.edu)

**if you are interested in volunteering for this important research.**

## APPENDIX C

### INITIAL INTERVIEW FORM

Respondent Number:

Date:

[Thanks for coming in. Let me tell you a bit about this research. I'm interested to learn more about how Black men who attended a community college responded to incidents and situations that seem to put them down: racial microaggressions. I am interested in learning more about how you responded if and when you faced assumptions here on a community college campus that seemed to stereotype you as a Black male as inferior or not worthy -- microaggressions is what university scholars call it: the micro assaults, insults, and the like that occur sometimes. Are there particular resources upon which Black men draw in response -- that's the larger context of my research]

If you choose to participate, I guarantee that whatever you say will not identify you by name. I will aggregate the data. This initial interview and the short test you will take shortly will determine whether you will be a fit for this research. If you are selected, you will be invited for a comprehensive interview session that will take place over the next few weeks.

First, some general questions:

Are you over 18 years of age?

Did you attend one of the three community colleges in this area [colleges will be identified by name for the potential study participants] ?

While in attendance at this community college did you observe any situation or situations on campus, inside or outside of the classroom, that you would consider racist?

While in attendance at this community college, did you personally experience a situation or situations, inside or outside of the classroom, that you would consider racist?

Would you be willing to now take a pen and paper questionnaire that asks how you respond to various situations -- how you cope, what resources you draw upon? It's called an AMOS scale. Again, your identity is protected. Anonymity is guaranteed. The AMOS scale will explore your spirituality and religiosity. It is not an assessment of you and there are no right or wrong answers.

Thanks!



APPENDIX D

INFORMATION AND CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR ASSISTANTS

Date:

Name:

You are being compensated with a gift of \$8.00 (eight dollars) an hour to assist in distributing flyers for this research study and for administering and scoring the AMOS assessment instrument. You will assist for no more than eight (8) hours at a time and you will be able to take breaks as needed.

By signing this document, you agree to complete the work as outlined and to adhere to the guidelines as outlined. You will:

- Distribute the flyers at the locations designated by the researcher
- Administer and score the AMOS at a time and location designated by the researcher
- Respect each potential study participant by identifying him only by the number assigned to him by the researcher
- Respect the confidentiality this research guarantees by not seeking to identify any potential study participant by name
- Voluntarily remove yourself from administering and scoring the AMOS for any potential study participant you know personally or casually
- Not disclose any details of this research that might compromise the confidentiality or anonymity it promises to those potential study participants who have volunteered to take the AMOS

\_\_\_\_\_ Signed Name

\_\_\_\_\_ Printed Name

## APPENDIX E

### COMPREHENSIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date:

Randomly Assigned Name:

[Thanks for agreeing to help out further with this research study. I want to focus on what scholars talk about as racial microaggressions. Back in the late 1960s, Dr. Chester Pierce, a Black psychiatrist, wrote about offensive mechanisms that on a one-on-one level maintained whiteness as a dominating force over those of us of African descent. His concept about offensive mechanisms maintaining whiteness as a standard now has evolved into what's talk about racial microaggressions. These are put-downs, stereotypes and the like. The poster explains a bit more about what they are and how the questions can relate to some of them. Do you have any questions before we begin?]

Did you experience a racial microaggression when you were a community college student?

Did this happen on one or more occasions?

Please explain, in detail, what you recall about each of these occasions.

Why do you feel this event these events were racially motivated?

What did you think about when these microaggressions occurred?

How did you feel in each of these situations?

What did you do in each of these situations?

Why, now with hindsight, do you think you reacted the way you did?

Have you experienced other racial microaggressions in the past?

Please describe, in detail, a few of these situations.

What did you do in these situations?

What did you do in the past that was different from what you have done recently when something like that occurs?

How do you think you have been affected over time by these racial microaggressions?

When confronted with racial microaggressions, what keeps you focused on your personal goals so that the act does not deter you or create depression or sadness?

How do you bounce back?

What keeps you from giving up? What keeps you forging ahead with your goals?

Define for me your spirituality

How does this play out in your day-to-day life and activities?

How do you express your spirituality?

What role has your spirituality played in your academic pursuits?

Does your spirituality impact or influence the “meaning” or “purpose” for your life?

How does it do this?

Does your spiritual belief system influence your relationships with people? How?

What do you feel your spirituality provides for you?

Does it guide your life and decisions? How?

When confronted with racial microaggressions, what goes through your mind?

Do you think there will ever be a time on college campuses when racial dynamics will get better?

What do you think it will take to make that happen?

Any thoughts that have come up for you that I have not asked you about.

Many thanks!

APPENDIX F

LIST OF POSSIBLE NAMES TO BE RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO  
STUDY PARTICIPANTS FOR DATA ANALYSIS

Ernest Gaines	Claude Brown
Richard Wright	Amiri Baraka
Ralph Ellison	August Wilson
John Edgar Wideman	Haki Madhubuti
Langston Hughes	Jean Toomer
Paul Laurence Dunbar	Chester Himes
Countee Cullen	E. Lynn Harris
Frederick Douglass	Ed Bullins
Alain Locke	Eric Jerome Dickey
James Baldwin	Charles W. Chesnutt
James Alan McPherson	Dudley Randsall
Isdrael Reed	Herb Boyd
Sterling A. Brown	

APPENDIX G  
CONSENT FORM

University of Massachusetts Boston

Department of Leadership in Higher Education  
100 Morrissey Boulevard  
Boston, MA. 02125-3393

**Consent Form**

Spirituality as a Viable Resource in Responding to Racial Microaggressions: An  
Exploratory Study of Black Males Who Have Attended a Community College

**Principal Investigator:** Lloyd Sheldon Johnson

**Introduction and Contact Information:**

You are asked to take part in a research project that explores how Black males who have attended a community college respond to racial microaggressions and whether their spirituality influences their response choices. The researcher is Lloyd Sheldon Johnson, Professor, Department of Behavioral Science, Bunker Hill Community College; Doctoral Candidate, University of Massachusetts Boston. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have further questions later, Lloyd Sheldon Johnson will discuss them with you. You may reach him by telephone at his office at 617-228-2497 or at home at 617-441-9945, or by email at [lsjohnson@bhcc.mass.edu](mailto:lsjohnson@bhcc.mass.edu). Lloyd Sheldon Johnson's academic advisor is Dr. Judith Gill. You may contact her at the University of

Massachusetts Boston, Department of Leadership in Higher Education. Her email address is [judith.gill@umb.edu](mailto:judith.gill@umb.edu).

**Description of the Project:**

The primary purpose of this study is to conduct research that will examine how spirituality is constructed by Black males who attended a community college and how it informs and influences their choices when, and if, they encounter racial microaggressions. In studying the complexity of responses to racism and the utility of spirituality for Black males who attended a community college, it is important to understand these concepts from the subject's point of view (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). This research seeks to understand the responses of Black males who attended a community college where they may have had to manage racial microaggressions; the research seeks a deeper understanding by listening to the voices and stories of those who lived through these experiences (Van Manen, 1984).

Participation in this study will require an initial interview where you will provide some basic demographic information (age, community college you attended, and whether you have experienced or witnessed a racial microaggression) and respond to a series of questions that will determine your level of spirituality. This should take less than an hour. If you are selected from the study pool and asked to participate in the comprehensive interview, then that should also take no longer than an hour.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to submit to the initial interview which has two components: you will respond to a short list of interview questions and you will be asked to take the Armstrong Measure of Spirituality (AMOS).

Next, the comprehensive interview will require you allow the researcher to audio-tape an open-ended interview session.

At no time during this process will your name be used or associated with the audio tapes or the transcriptions of the tapes. At any time during the audio-taping process, you may ask the interviewer to stop the tape. If at any time during your participation in this study you wish to terminate your involvement, you are free to do so. The only persons who will listen to the tapes will be you and, the researcher. At completion of the dissertation for this research, all audiotapes will be destroyed.

The researcher will transcribe the audiotapes. Transcriptions of the tapes, in whole or part, may be used after this research to be included in written documents related to this study. Again, at no point in time will anyone be able to connect you, by name, with any of the transcriptions or written materials related to this study.

Study participants involved in the initial interview process will be given gift bags that contain healthy snacks. Prior to distributing these gift bags, participants will be asked if they have any food allergies. For those who do, gift bags containing spring water will be offered. For those 15 participants who *complete* the comprehensive interview process, \$20.00 gift cards to a local restaurant chain will be given as incentive, paid for by the researcher.

**Risks or Discomforts:**

The primary risk associated with this study is the emergence of negative or distressful feelings that may emerge when recalling or reliving a racial microaggression. Participants will be informed of the possibility that this could occur. The researcher, a

professional counselor-therapist, will be able to identify indicators that would alert him to a problem; he will know when to intervene. You may speak with Lloyd Sheldon Johnson to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation. If you wish to discuss concerns with an outside counselor or therapist, Lloyd Sheldon Johnson will provide you with a list of licensed psychiatrists, psychologists and licensed clinical social workers (LCSW) who specialize in providing services to a Black male population.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:**

Your part in this research is confidential. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you or the community college you attended. Information gathered for this project will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office and only the researcher will have access to the office and the data. To protect your privacy, no personal identification will be used on any of the draft or final documents. You will be identified by a random number assigned to you for the initial interview. If you are one of the 15 selected for the comprehensive interview, you will be randomly assigned the name of a famous Black male writer. This name will be drawn from a bowl containing 25 names. Any data and materials collected during the research, including the audiotapes, will be returned to you once the dissertation is completed. If you do not wish to have the materials returned, they will be destroyed once the data analysis is completed.



**Voluntary Participation:**

The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may terminate participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to terminate participation, you should contact Lloyd Sheldon Johnson directly or by email. Should you decide to terminate participation, all data related to you, including audiotapes, will be returned to you promptly.

**Registration for Courses Taught by the Researcher:**

As a condition of participation in this research, I agree not to register for any courses taught by Lloyd Sheldon Johnson until after the dissertation has been completed. By signing this document, I agree to this condition.

**Rights:**

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. You can reach Lloyd Sheldon Johnson at his office at 617-228-2497 or at home at 617-441-9945, or by email at [lsjohnson@bhcc.mass.edu](mailto:lsjohnson@bhcc.mass.edu). Lloyd Sheldon Johnson's dissertation chairperson is Dr. Judith Gill at the University of Massachusetts Boston, Department of Leadership in Higher Education, [judith.gill@umb.edu](mailto:judith.gill@umb.edu). If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached at the following address: IRB, Quinn Administration Building-2-080, University of Massachusetts

Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

**Signatures:**

I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.

_____	_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Date	Signature of Researcher

_____	<u>Lloyd Sheldon Johnson</u>
Printed Name of Participant	Typed/Printed Name of Researcher

APPENDIX H  
RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

Racial microaggressions are the verbal and nonverbal behavioral cues and actions that communicate hostility and negativity. They are the insults, assaults, and invalidations that are harmful and damaging put-downs.

*If you read through the list below, you will get an idea of what Dr. Pierce was focused on when he coined the phrase “microaggression” over forty years ago.*

**Microinsult –**

“Why do you wear your hair like that?”

“Are you in a gang?”

“I didn’t know you were taking Calculus.”

“Yo ‘bro,’ what up?”

**Microassault –**

“We don’t want no ‘homeboys’ here, you know what I mean?”

“We don’t want no trouble in here.”

Use of the “n” word.

Hostile actions designed to start a fight.

Being followed and suspected of being a thief in a store.

**Microinvalidation –**

Photos or public displays that exclude Blacks.

“You speak English well; you are so articulate.”

“If you are qualified, you will get the job.”

“Some of my best friends are Black, but I don’t see color,

I see human beings.”

APPENDIX I

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Name	Place of Birth	Religious Tradition Reared In	Self-Described Religious Affiliation	AMOS Score	Community Colleges Attended
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<p>Alex Haley</p> <p>God gives you that inner sense. It all begins with you turning to God. I know I have God with me and I will be a winner. Racism is not going away, and spirituality influences my responses. I got to keep going.</p>	<p>Evanston, Ill</p>	<p>Christian</p>	<p>Muslim</p>	<p>275</p>	<p>Kumasi, Accra</p>
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<p>Amiri Baraka</p> <p>It is in our spirit, in our blood, to keep going! I believe in a Higher Power! There is a Higher Power! I live my life as free as possible, to have integrity. My Higher Power keeps me doing the right thing. Spirituality keeps me focused!</p>	<p>Cambridge MA</p>	<p>Christian</p>	<p>Spiritual Christian</p>	<p>277</p>	<p>Cape Coast, Accra</p>
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<p>August Wilson</p> <p>My strength comes from Jesus. I don't fall. I just keep going. Jesus Christ is my Savior and I rely on him. I trust that everything will work out for the goodness and the glory of Him. I use Jesus to walk me through the difficulties. I have to be the best I can.</p>	<p>Boston, MA</p>	<p>Christian</p>	<p>Christian</p>	<p>282</p>	<p>Accra</p>
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Booker T. Washington	Boston, MA	Catholic	Christian	280	Cape Coast, Accra
<p>I treat people the way I want to be treated. I work to improve my faith and my actions. I ask, "what would Jesus do?" I know I have to be a man of faith and answer that calling. I used to be self-destructive. I pray for patience, guidance, and wisdom. I think about the kind of person I want to be and I can't let that bullshit [racism] influence me.</p>					
Countee Cullen	Guinea Bissau, West Africa	Catholic	Christian	293	Cape Coast
<p>I don't take these things on. I don't let it [racism] get to me. I am an optimist and I stay focused. I am a regular guy who believes in God. Spirituality weighs in on the decisions I make. I pray and I read Scripture.</p>					
Ed Bullins	Cambridge	Catholic	Spiritual Christian	278	Cape Coast
<p>I am comfortable with who I am. I use my knowledge to fight back. Racism makes me angry, but it has made me stronger. You must use spirituality as your protector. I get into myself by using what I learned from my mother, who opened our household to anyone, any nationality. I feel compassion for people who are racist because they are stupid.</p>					

<p>Ernest Gaines</p> <p>I am going to be honest. Racism makes me angry. It makes me upset. I just don't give up. I lift up my head and keep moving forward. I pray to God, hope that things will work out well and move on. I pray. I still pray every night. I'm into being happy.</p>	<p>St. Kitts, West Indies</p>	<p>Jehovah's Witness</p>	<p>Christian</p>	<p>281</p>	<p>Kumasi, Accra</p>
<p>Fredrick Douglass</p> <p>You know, you have to bounce back or they [the racists] win. Giving up is not an option! What you do today, you do for the next generation. I don't turn the other cheek, I smile. You should feel sorry for them [racists]. I feel sorry for them because of their stupidity. Treat people good. Do something good for someone everyday.</p>	<p>Haiti</p>	<p>Christian</p>	<p>Spiritual Christian</p>	<p>284</p>	<p>Accra</p>
<p>James Alan McPherson</p> <p>I bite the bullet. I am not one to complain about it [racism]. I keep the faith. Keeping the faith is my biggest asset. That's what keeps me going. I know a better day is coming because of my faith. I always bounce back stronger!</p>	<p>Peoria, Ill</p>	<p>A.M.E. Christian</p>	<p>Christian</p>	<p>279</p>	<p>Cape Coast, Accra</p>
<p>James Baldwin</p> <p>There is something inside of me - perseverance and strength. The issue is those other people [the racists]; I am not the issue. I take a little bit from every faith and weave it all together. I can't give up. I don't know what giving up is.</p>	<p>Boston</p>	<p>Catholic</p>	<p>Spiritual Christian</p>	<p>281</p>	<p>Accra</p>

My spirituality gives me peace and hope.

<p>Langston Hughes</p> <p>I am honest to a fault. My spirituality provides a bit of hope, knowing there is something better, something to look forward to. I believe you should do unto others as you wish for them to treat you. I believe in Jesus Christ and I believe in spirits. We have to do right in life and stay on the right path. I feel sorry for them [racists].</p>	<p>Boston, MA</p>	<p>Christian Baptist</p>	<p>Spiritual Christian</p>	<p>292</p>	<p>Kumasi, Accra</p>
<p>Martin Luther King, Jr.</p> <p>Racism makes me angry. It always comes back to me believing in a Higher Power. And I do believe that God has great things in store for me. My spirituality has helped me to remain level headed. When I think about it [racism], these people are sick and need help! I do have the ability to forgive those who have been racist.</p>	<p>Boston, MA</p>	<p>Baptist</p>	<p>Baptist Christian</p>	<p>290</p>	<p>Cape Coast, Accra</p>
<p>Paul Laurence Dunbar</p> <p>I try not to internalize things. I pray for those who are racist. My spirituality provides me with the strength to overcome any challenges that come my way. I talk about things to let them out.</p>	<p>Ghana, West Africa</p>	<p>Christian</p>	<p>Christian</p>	<p>289</p>	<p>Cape Coast, Accra</p>
<p>Ralph Ellison</p> <p>Racism makes me angry, but I am not going to react and go to jail! People need to find people to be with who are on a positive road. I pray. I do pray, pray. I pray a lot! Praying keeps me focused so I won't give up. It helps me to think about sacrifices and what I need to do to get</p>	<p>Boston</p>	<p>Baptist Christian</p>	<p>Christian</p>	<p>275</p>	<p>Cape Coast, Kumasi, Accra</p>

ahead.

Richard Wright

Barbados,  
West  
Indies

Pentecostal

Spiritual  
Christian

291

Accra

When I deal with it [racism], I try to bounce back. Sometimes you have to put your head down and barrel forth; sometimes you have to confront it. My spirituality gives me social strength and keeps me grounded. I meditate, and I pray. I am able to get through the tough times by creating a sense of peace and calm in my head regardless of what is going on around me.



APPENDIX J  
RESEARCH REVIEW TEAM

Number	Race/Ethnicity	Age/Gender	Education	Current Professional Position	Area of Research and Professional Expertise
One	Black	29/Male	M.Ed., M.A.	Inner-City High School Principal	Working with at-risk students, developing programs that foster academic success, leadership in urban schools, community liaison
Two	White	47/Male	M.L.S.	Senior University Research Librarian	Research methods and research design, data analysis, editing
Three	White	45/Female	M.F.A.	College Dean	Research design, curriculum development and design, teaching and learning, literacy, leadership in higher education, learning communities, cooperative education, integrative learning
Four	White	51/Male	Ph.D.	Professor, Independent Researcher, Grant Writer, National Consultant	Reading, writing, literacy, program development, curriculum design, cross-cultural studies, diversity specialist, organizational behavior
Five	Black	39/Male	M.A.	College Professor	Diversity, LGBTQ studies, learning communities, teaching at-risk students, international education, writing and editing, cultural competency
Six	Black	56/Male	M.A., M.P. S.	College Professor, International Education and	Diversity, cultural competency, higher education leadership, critical race theory, new education and learning models and paradigms, teaching and learning

APPENDIX K

BRIEF PROFILES OF OTHER STUDY PARTICIPANTS

<p>Booker T. Washington</p>	<p>Booker T. was born and raised in Boston and has fathered two children. He was in his early 30s and attended Cape Coast Community College and Accra Community College. He was raised Catholic and committed to his faith, though he did not attend church. He was in the military and received benefits as a result of being in the service. Booker said “Jesus” is his model of goodness and that “through caring and not being negative energy,” you can “translate the teachings [of the Bible] into practice.” Because he cared, he felt bad for racists. When he encountered racial microaggressions at community college, his compassion guided him to treat people right and not resort to anger or violence. He said the right thing to do is to forgive.</p>
<p>Countee Cullen</p>	<p>Countee was born in Guinea Bissau and raised in Florida by his aunt and uncle. He was in his early 20s and attended Cape Coast Community College. He was raised Catholic; “a young man who prays and reads the Bible.” He considered himself a very spiritual, forgiving, compassionate person who was always positive. When Countee encountered racial microaggressions at college and in the past in Florida, he used his spirituality to guide him toward forgiveness. He said he sometimes found racial microaggressions to be masked in rudeness and sometimes masked in kindness. He said that sometimes people may smile at you, but they have evil intentions. He said he walks away from most situations he would</p>

	<p>consider racist because he did not “want to get caught up in negativity. Forgiveness is key.”</p>
Ed Bullins	<p>Ed Bullins was born in Boston. He was the father of a newborn son. He was raised Catholic and considered himself spiritual. He was in his early 40s and graduated from Cape Coast Community College with a bachelor’s degree.</p> <p>Ed said he encountered racial microaggressions and knew of many Black students who did so as well. He said that most times there were differences in how Black students and white students were graded. He offered that racial microaggressions made him “very upset” but he was “not going to let anyone rock” his spiritual foundation. He said he uses his knowledge and spirituality to overcome the acts of racism. He meditated, respected everyone he met, and went deep within to find compassion for racist people.</p>
Ernest Gaines	<p>Ernest Gaines was born in St. Kitts, West Indies, and was the father of two sons. He was in his late 20s and was raised Jehovah’s Witness. He defined himself as spiritual. He prayed to God on a personal level because he “could not get into all of the craziness” of the Witnesses. He attended Cape Coast Community College and planned to continue his education.</p> <p>Ernest recalled the stereotypes he heard about Blacks upon coming to the United States and said he always felt his professors thought he was not smart enough to be in college and to do the work. He said that racism made him angry, but he couldn’t let it keep him from his goals. He also said that he responded to racial microaggressions with forgiveness. He said, “I want</p>

	<p>to say that ‘who I am’ is to forgive.”</p>
<p>James Alan McPherson</p>	<p>James was born and raised in Illinois. He was a single man who came to Boston after being in the military. James was in his early 30s and was raised Christian, African Methodist Episcopal (AME). For him, religion meant staying connected to God. He had many memories of racial microaggressions he experienced and observed, both while a student at Cape Coast Community College and Accra Community College and while in the military.</p> <p>He described himself as “a tough guy” who was committed to his faith. This faith, he said, keeps him going. He reflected a lot on “the past evils of racism” and used his spirituality to keep “his sanity,” as he put it. He said that peace of mind is important to him and that he always bounces back because he has faith.</p>
<p>Paul Laurence Dunbar</p>	<p>Paul was born in Ghana, West Africa, and was raised in the Christian tradition. He attended Cape Coast Community College and Accra Community College. He was in his early 30s and married, expecting his first child. He had earned both a Bachelors and Masters degree. He said he was committed to his faith and tried to attend church regularly.</p> <p>Dunbar said that racism disturbed him and racial microaggressions he had encountered usually involved issues of intelligence and performance in the classroom. He felt he was judged differently from white students and this made him feel bad. He said he prayed for those who are racist and that prayer gives him strength. He felt that if you know who you are through</p>

	<p>God, these racial microaggressions won't bother you as much. He said, "people need a spiritual life to help them get through."</p>
<p>Ralph Ellison</p>	<p>Ralph was born in Boston and attended Cape Coast Community College, Kumasi Community College, and Accra Community College. He was in his early 20s, was raised Christian, and considered himself a Christian. He said he had a strong commitment to God and community and this is what kept him going. He was looking to transfer to a four-year college.</p> <p>He felt that racial microaggressions were always around him at the community colleges he attended and they "aggravated" him. He recalled having many of these encounters while at Accra Community College. He felt that Black males are targeted by the media and society and that it had harmed him a bit. He said that when confronted with racial microaggressions he looks to the positive and tries to be himself. His spirituality helped him to push forward in bad times and good by "knowing God and praying." He said, "God is the answer."</p>

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