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African American Male College Students Navigate to Achieve: The Relationship Among College Adjustment Experiences, Coping, and GPA for Black Males at Two Predominantly White Institutions

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AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS NAVIGATE TO ACHIEVE: 
THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT EXPERIENCES, 
COPING, AND GPA FOR BLACK MALES AT TWO 
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

By

Sabrina Denise Walters

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AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE COLLEGE STUDENTS NAVIGATE TO ACHIEVE: THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT EXPERIENCES, COPING, AND GPA FOR BLACK MALES AT TWO PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

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African American males face daunting obstacles as they pursue higher education as research has shown. This study sought to better understand the impact of specific factors—social support, racial identity, perceived racial discrimination, coping, and religious coping—on the academic achievement of African American male college student achievement. Using secondary data and a Multiple Linear Regression analyses, the project investigated relationships among these influences as a way of uncovering strategies used to mitigate obstacles faced by African American males attending Predominantly White Institutions. The study used an anti-deficit achievement approach to examine how African American male college students at two PWIs negotiate experiences and the use of coping mechanisms that may positively affect academic achievement for this subgroup of students. Results of the study indicate that the college experiences and coping mechanisms examined have a limited impact on GPA for African American male students. The results indicate that higher education professionals should focus attention on providing avenues for African American male students to express religious and other coping techniques to assist in achievement and to better manage the effects of discrimination and isolation that are part of their transition to PWIs. Future research on
African American male college student achievement should include a broader sample group from various campus types to increase the generalizability of the findings.
This work honors my late aunt, Roslyn Annette Mackie, whose life of serving, giving, and loving inspired my own. I am forever grateful for the inspiration she gave me to believe in myself and to shoot for the stars even when there seemed no glimmer of hope. Auntie Roz, may your legacy of selflessness live on.

Dedication

The project is dedicated to my daughter, Hailey Grace. Hailey, it was you who kept me focused along the way. Each day, I am amazed at your maturity and grace (hence, your middle name). Thank you for being so understanding when Mommy had to work on research and couldn’t pull away to attend events and spend free time with you. I am so very proud of you. I am eager to be by your side as you complete middle and high school and your own higher education journey. I am looking forward with excitement to your medical school graduation and the opening of your private practice. Love you more than more, Sweet Pea.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination, indeed, everything and anything except me.

Ralph Ellison (1952/1980)
The Invisible Man

Researchers have exhaustively examined the ongoing phenomenon of the scarcity and underachievement of African American men in college (Bailey & Moore, 2004; Davis, 2003; Moore, 2000; Strayhorn, 2008). Even in the K-12 pipeline, before African American male students reach higher education, they are already labeled vulnerable (Gibbs, 1988; Majors & Billson, 1992; Parham & McDavis, 1987). Bleak statistics underscore the challenges facing African American men in U.S. unemployment, education, incarceration, and mental health (Hoffman, Llagas, & Synder, 2003).

Young African American men are more likely to spend time in the juvenile justice system and to live shorter lives because of drug overdose, homicide, and suicide compared to their White peers (Gibbs, 1988). More than half of African American male youth are at risk for lower academic expectations and educational pitfalls (Lee, 1991), and have disproportionately higher levels of unemployment than Whites (Taylor, 1987). Researchers, consequently, have suggested that African American men are an endangered species (Cuyjet, 1997). A body of research characterizes African American men, more than any other group, as facing daunting obstacles that tend to curtail their chances at success in life, particularly in higher education.
Impediments have been identified that play a role in deterring the enrollment of African American men in college. Historically, African American men have been a missing group on college campuses (Harper, 2006; Herdon & Hirt, 2004). The number of African American men enrolled in college has not improved over time. In 1976, African American male students comprised only 4.3% of the college-going population. By 2002, that number had not changed (Harper, 2006; National Center on Education Statistics [NCES], 2004). Meanwhile, African American males represented about 6% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census, 2000). Black men make up the smallest number of the U.S. college-going population (the terms African American and Black are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation). Due to their low enrollment numbers, Black men often feel isolated and ignored on college campuses, especially at predominantly white institutions, also referred to as “PWIs” (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Such minimal presence further denigrates young African American male college students. Cuyjet (2006) pointed out the following:

As Ralph Ellison tried to explain in his 1952 novel The Invisible Man, white people who exist in a world with few if any Black people tend to make Black folks invisible on those few occasions when they do encounter them. Thus, the more opportunities for interracial encounters, the less likely one is to retain the ability to render other people “invisible” (p. 12).

Moreover, among the small number of Black men who do matriculate into postsecondary education, their achievement often lags behind that of their peers. African American students earn considerably lower grades than White students at every level of education (Benton, 2001). Nationally, more than two-thirds (67.6%) of Black men who start college do not graduate within 6 years and therefore have the lowest college
completion rate among all gender, racial, and ethnic groups in higher education (Harper, 2006). Researchers have pointed to a number of factors that influence academic achievement, such as social support, discrimination, racial identity and college transition issues (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Gonzales, Cause, Friedman, & Mason, 1996; Herdon & Hirt, 2004). There remains a need, however, to determine how these factors are related to individual coping skills and the relationship of specific factors to college achievement, particularly among young, emerging adult African American men for whom adult patterns of behavior are being practiced.

Additionally, there is no single school of thought regarding the cause of lower collegiate achievement of African American men. Scholars have identified cultural and institutional variables such as low socioeconomic status (SES), first generation status, and racism that contribute to low achievement among African American college students (Arbona & Novy, 1990; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Noguera, 2003). Some researchers have established alternate explanations for the underachievement of Black male college students, including the suggestion that Black students simply do not value education (Fryer, 2010). Two decades ago, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) wrote that Black students turn away from education because they do not want to appear to “act white.”

In the *Keepin’ It Real* study, however, Carter (2003) refuted the “acting white” theory, contending that Black youth do not resist academic excellence, but rather reject particular White cultural values and behavior, such as certain music and speech. Carter (2003) posited that Black youth understand the value of an education but feel that they
must retain their own cultural values while assimilating into the dominant culture. In his 2003 study of African American student motivation, Cokley asserted:

“The perception that African Americans do not value education is paradoxical and historically shortsighted when one considers that many African Americans fought, and in some cases sacrificed their lives, during the Civil Rights Movement to ensure that future generations of African Americans could have the right to a quality education wherever they wanted. If African Americans do not value education, why (then) do they go to college?” (p. 524)

Given the various ways that the value of education has been characterized, along with the evidence for lagging African American male academic achievement, further study of individual factors related to achievement is warranted to better understand how coping strategies interact with other factors for Black males attending PWIs.

At institutions not reflective of their culture, African American men face many internal and external distractions. Researchers have pointed to a number of barriers that African American students encounter at predominantly White institutions, including the pressure to achieve academically (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). In addition, African American students have few supportive relationships (Strayhorn, 2008), face challenging transitions (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002), and enter isolating campus environments with little social support (Fleming, 1984).

African American students also encounter discrimination and racism (Arminio et al., 2000; Cabrera et al., 1999; Watson et al., 2002) that further contribute to students’ feelings of isolation (Swail et al., 2003). Cabrera et al. (1999) asserts that unlike other stressors, experiences of discrimination are unique because they are present only among minority students and the increased feeling of not belonging at the institution affects a student’s academic performance. A climate of racism and discrimination result in
decreased desire among African American students to interact with students from other racial and ethnic groups, faculty, and campus administrators (Swail et al., 2003).

Although African American men confront a myriad of issues that affect their academic achievement, many do not accept their experiences passively. Rather they often successfully negotiate their college environment by employing coping strategies (Chiang, Hunter, & Yeh, 2004). Empirical evidence suggests that coping strategies can aid students to minimize some of the structural and interpersonal barriers to their college achievement (Sheu & Sedlacek, 2004). Previous studies have highlighted the negative variables that impede college achievement among African American males. In this study, however, coping strategies used by Black males to mitigate negative experiences and facilitate in academic success is examined.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study investigated the relationship between college experiences and coping strategies employed by African American male college students and their self-reported academic achievement. The study included the use of coping strategies by African American males to contribute to an understanding of this population of students who are negotiating postsecondary academic settings while transitioning into adulthood. Beyond examining systemic barriers, such as institutional racism, low SES and the lack of precollege experiences that have been documented to derail academic success in this population, this study included students’ experiences, characteristics, perceptions, and strategies as they related to academic achievement. This study contributes to the literature by investigating the phenomenology of African American college students’ experiences during a developmental and psychosocial transition, when participants are negotiating the
specific context of higher education where they are present in proportionately low numbers relative their White peers.

Three theoretical conceptualizations informed this project. The study utilized Schlossberg’s (1984) psychosocial transition theory, Harper’s (2010) anti-deficit framework, and Tinto’s (1975) integration theory to investigate the relationship between coping strategies, experiences of discrimination, racial identity, social support, and academic achievement (GPA) among African American male college students. It is intended that results from this study provide insight into the role that each of these constructs play in the academic achievement of African American male college students. Findings may assist practitioners in developing resources, programming and supportive interventions to improve African American male college student success.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The study investigated two primary research questions and four specific hypotheses associated with these questions:

**Research Question 1.** What are the associations between academic achievement as measured by self-reported GPA and social support, experience of perceived racial discrimination, racial identity, coping, and religious coping strategies among African American male college students at two PWIs?

**Research Question 2.** Does religious and distractive coping moderate the experience of discrimination and academic achievement among African American male college students who utilize coping mechanisms compared to those who do not?
The following hypotheses were investigated:

1. Higher levels of social support will be associated with higher academic achievement, as measured by GPA.

2. Higher levels of positive feelings related to self, (e.g., private regard as a dimension of racial identity), in African American males will be related to higher academic achievement, as measured by GPA.

3. Greater endorsement of specific coping strategies, including religious and distractive coping, will be related to higher academic achievement, as measured by GPA.

4. Religious and distractive coping will buffer or moderate the negative effect of discrimination and be related to higher reported GPA.

**Significance of the Study**

For those African American males who succeed in attending college, the road to academic success is often tumultuous and filled with the normal stresses of transitioning into adulthood and the added impact of being a Black male (e.g., encountering discrimination and isolation). Therefore, it is critical to examine the relationship between GPA and coping strategies that may positively affect the education for this subgroup of students.

This study sought to better understand the impact of specific factors—social support, racial identity, perceived racial discrimination, coping, and religious coping—on the academic achievement of African American male college student achievement. The project investigated relationships among these influences as a way of uncovering strategies used to mitigate obstacles faced by African American males at
PWIs. The study also provided an often disregarded anti-deficit approach to the traditional African American male narrative. The current study investigates academic achievement using self-reported GPA as a barometer of academic achievement. However, the broader use of achievement and college success includes persistence (Tinto, 1975), or semester-to-semester retention, and ultimately graduation. Tinto also expresses the need for college students to be immersed in both campus social and academic life as a means to semester-to-semester achievement, which ultimately leads to graduation. Tinto suggests that social relationships are directly tied to academic achievement and college completion, or success, an idea at the core of the social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital considers the establishment of social networks to academic success and broader life success; it includes social resources and networks that allow individuals to share educational attainment, and economic, or social attainment (Bourdieu, 1986). African American male college student achievement goes beyond GPA to include success throughout life developed through their ability to successfully balance academics as well as social networks that garner life-long connections and experiences that aid in success in graduate school and in employment.

This study will bolster the body of research on the successful factors of African American male college students, whose lack of achievement has long been a source of concern for college administrators.

**Definition of Terms**

*African American male college students* are male students who identify race or ethnicity as *African American* or *Black* and are enrolled at the two institutions involved in this study.
African American is a person of African heritage or descent who was born in the United States. The terms African American and Black are used interchangeably in this study.

Coping is defined as an active process of managing trying circumstances, expending energy to solve personal problems, and working to master, minimize, reduce or tolerate conflict (Snyder, 2014; Weiten & Lloyd, 2008; Zeidner & Endler, 1996).

Distractive coping is defined by the response styles theory (RST) (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1990; Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008) as actively moving attention away from depressive symptoms and onto pleasant or neutral thoughts or activities. According to RST (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991), unlike rumination responses to depressive symptoms, which increases and prolongs depressive states, distraction lessons them.

Grade Point Average (GPA) is a measure of achievement using a grading scale that employs letter grades from A to F and a corresponding point scale from 4.0 to 0.0. The GPA is a calculation of the overall average of all of a student’s grades on an official college transcript.

Perceived racial discrimination is a person’s own, subjective appraisal of racially motivated actions or behaviors of others (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998).

Predominantly White Institution (PWI) is a higher education institution that enrolls a majority White student population.

Racial identity is described through the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley & Chavous, 1998; Sellers Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). MMRI proposes four dimensions of identity
development for African Americans—(a) racial salience, (b) racial centrality, (c) racial regard, and (d) racial ideology. *Racial salience* refers to the extent an individual’s race is a relevant part of self-concept at a particular time or in a particular situation (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 24). *Racial centrality* refers to the extent to which an individual normatively defines himself or herself with regard to race.

Although racial salience is situation-centered, racial centrality is a stable self-perception across multiple situations. Implicit in the centrality of racial identity is its close proximity to an individual's core definition of self, challenged by other forms of identity including gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic position, and others. In the third dimension, *racial regard*, Sellers et al. (1998) assert that African American views vary in their affective and evaluative judgments of their racial group (e.g., *private regard*) and in their beliefs about how others see and judge them (e.g., *public regard*). It is influenced by an individual's assessment of how his or her ethnic group is viewed by the wider society. *Racial ideology* refers to the person's philosophy about the ways in which African Americans should live and interact.

*Religious coping* is identified by Pargament et al. (1988) as embodying three different styles: deferring, collaborative, and self-directing. In the deferring style, individuals rely solely on God to handle stressors—they take no responsibility for handling stressors. The collaborative approach involves joint responsibility, in which individuals work with God to solve problems. The self-directing style is an active approach in which individuals rely on themselves to deal with stressors while still relying on their religion for support.
Social support is defined as perceived available support, perceived emotional support, or the presence of at least one person for an individual to confide in (Jackson, 1992). Familial and social support is described as the existence or quantity of social ties or relationships and the frequency of contact (Kiecolt, Hughes, & Keith, 2008).
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this review, the forces that play a role in mitigating negative influences that impact the lives of African American male college students at PWIs and their relationship to academic achievement (GPA) are examined. Specifically, social support, racial identity, perceived racial discrimination, coping, and religious coping are discussed. Three theoretical models are used to inform the present study.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto’s Integration Model (1975)

Tinto’s (1975) theory of student persistence is highlighted to help organize the conceptualization of student experiences. Specifically, Tinto’s two primary indicators of college student success, or persistence—integration into social and academic communities—provided a structure to understand the journey of young African American males in higher education. Specifically, to better understand the road to academic success among the group of African American men in this study, Tinto’s (1975) model of student persistence and academic integration, one of the most prominent models of persistence in higher education, helped guide the study. Tinto proposed a theoretical model linking academic and social integration to student success. According to Tinto, “given individual characteristics, prior experiences, and commitments, it is the individual’s integration into the academic and social systems of the college that are most directly related to his continuance in that college” (p. 96). While GPA typically measures a student’s success on a grading scale, persistence is an indicator of a student’s ability to perform well enough to continue from semester to semester. This study focuses on the success of
African American males at two PWIs, as measured by GPA, while examining the students’ transitions and college experiences. Tinto’s (1975) persistence and academic integration theory offer insight into experiences that predict academic success.

Tinto's (1975) model employed previous research to help create a more comprehensive longitudinal student persistence model than what existed in the literature at the time. Tinto explored Durkheim’s (1970) theory on suicide. Suicide, according to Durkheim (1970), is directly linked to a lack of integration into the broader society. Those who commit suicide seek to break off from the society in which they did not have a connection in the first place (Durkheim, 1970). Tinto used this conceptualization of suicide in his analogy of the behavior of students who do not fit into a college environment and therefore drop out.

Tinto (1975) also examined Spady’s (1970) college student retention model, which focuses on the integration and interaction of students in their college environment. Spady (1970) found that students who are able to assimilate into their academic and social life are less likely to withdraw from an institution. Tinto’s (1975) model was also influenced by Van Gennep's (1960) rites of passage, a longitudinal retention model that examined students’ social and academic transitions at traditional residential colleges.

Combining findings from earlier research with findings from his own longitudinal study, Tinto (1975) created a broader model of retention.

At the core of Tinto’s (1975) persistence model is the concept that the greater the academic and social integration of a student, the greater the likelihood that the student will succeed in college. Tinto made a distinction in his reference to integration, which is often used interchangeably with involvement and engagement in the research literature.
According to Tinto (2010), both involvement and engagement refer to observable behaviors, and integration refers to a “value interaction such as arises when one perceives oneself as a valued member of a community” (p. 78). An intimate connection to the values and culture of the institution must be made by a student to experience integration (Tinto, 1975). In other words, integration is a “state of being; [and] is based on perceptions of student fit with their campus and, by extension, perceptions of interactions that reflect the values and norms of the institution and its culture” (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009, p. 416).

The model created by Tinto (1975) is particularly critical to this study because of the body of research that reflects the difficulty African American males face on predominantly White college campuses, both socially and academically. Tinto asserted that adjustment issues and feelings of isolation can have a negative effect on a student’s ability to integrate and thus impede academic and social success; this could explain disparities in academic achievement among Black males at PWIs as reflected in the literature. Tinto further explained that greater levels of academic and social integration also result in greater levels of commitment to a student’s educational goals and to the institution the student attends, which subsequently reflects positively on the student’s academic performance and persistence (Tinto, 1975; 1997; 1998).

In Tinto’s model (1993), which has been revised several times, he presented three key factors that predispose a student to persist, or succeed, in college. Those factors include (a) a student’s background, (b) precollege education, and (c) personal attributes. A student’s background is measured by his or her socioeconomic status, educational expectations, and level of parent education. Personal attributes include race and gender,
while precollege education can include academic preparedness and social and academic ability.

Important to Tinto’s (1993) theory is the level of academic and social interaction on campus, which can mediate variables of predisposed factors and academic success. Since many African American male students often lack some of the predisposed factors pointed out by Tinto, it is important to note the caveat expressed by Tinto that higher levels of academic and social integration can increase chances of academic success, compensating for a deficit in predisposed experiences. Alternatively, Tinto (1993) offered four types of experiences that might cause a student to prematurely withdraw from an institution before graduation: adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation. Adjustment refers to the transition from home to college. For some students, the experience is too daunting, and the student withdraws from school. Difficulty is the students’ ability to perform academically and to meet the standards set by the college. When a student finds the academic rigor of college too intense, the student then drops out.

Incongruence refers to the college not meeting the students’ needs, values, and interests. When the student and the institution are a misfit, a student will leave college. Students who do not develop social networks and who lack any meaningful relationships with their peers and faculty experience isolation. Lack of a social network causes an individual to feel isolated and leads an individual to withdraw (Tinto, 1993).

While Tinto’s integration model is widely accepted, one of the major criticisms is that it is not generalizable to ethnic minority college students, including African American males. A number of researchers have found that ethnic minority students fare better in college by keeping ties with their families at home and not necessarily shedding
those relationships by immersing in their new college environment, as proposed in the persistence model (Tinto, 1975). In fact, strengthening ties to family and friends has been found to ease the transition process for ethnic minority college students at PWIs (Gonzalez, 2002). Although the Tinto (1975) persistence theory is widely respected in higher education literature, it has been criticized for the focus on assimilation and acculturation of students into the dominant college culture, a process that could be counterproductive to the transition process for Black male students.

Tinto’s (1993) model may help explain college student success by describing experiences that play a role in persistence. For the current study, Tinto’s model helps conceptualize African American male student success by offering a framework that highlights the transition process, including the effects of isolation. Figure G1 displays this model in terms of characteristics prior to college entry, academic and social characteristics of the academic system, and commitments to goals and the institution. In contrast, Schlossberg (1984) offers a psychosocial transitional theory that explores coping strategies as its focus.

**Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1984)**

Schlossberg (1984) introduced a transition model to help understand coping strategies of adults in transition. As Tinto explains, college students are in transition and adapting—or integrating—to their new environment is critical to persistence and success. To that end, Schlossberg’s model provides a framework to investigate the transition process through the lens of coping strategies. Schlossberg’s (1984) model is described in the literature as a development theory (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Researchers such as Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson (2006), Schlossberg (1984),
and Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman (1995) utilized the model for counseling adults in transition and for providing a framework to examine the academic and social needs of adult students. While originally used for older adults, the framework helps to understand the perceived demands and coping techniques used by those in transition, including young, emerging college students and their campus experiences (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

Transition may be characterized in multiple ways. Schlossberg (1984) defined transition as an event that results in a change in relationships and routines in critical areas of life, such as changes in work, family, health, or economics. This definition highlights the concept that life transitions alter relationships, roles and beliefs (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33). The balance of an individual’s assets and liabilities determines the outcome of the transition (Schlossberg, 1984). For instance, how one perceives a transition depends on the amount of positive and negative attributes a person believes is involved in the transition, which in turn produces the outcome of the transition, good or bad. In essence, if an asset is greater than the liability then the transition will be less difficult (Schlossberg et al., 1995). For African American male college students, life-changing events occur as they transition through adulthood, particularly their transition in college.

While transitions differ, the structure for understanding individuals in transition is the same. According to Schlossberg et al. (1995), there are three types of transitions: anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevents. Anticipated transitions are major events that are expected, such as graduating from high school or college. In this case, individuals can plan for the event. Unanticipated transitions are unexpected and disrupt routine. Often the unanticipated transition is a crisis, which does not allow for planning, such as an
unexpected death. Nonevent transitions are expected events that fail to transpire or do not occur, such as not getting an expected internship or job. At the core of Schlossberg’s (1984) transition theory is the assumption that an individual’s personal view of change determines the meaning of the transition. For example, how African American male college students respond to the changes that occur during their college experience and how they adapt to the change depend on coping strategies they have used in the past, which allows them to assess the situation and determine whether there are greater assets than liabilities, like the benefit of succeeding in college and earning a college degree.

According to Goodman et al (2006), Schlossberg (1984), and Schlossberg et al. (1995), four factors influence how an individual might cope with transition: situation, self, support, and coping strategies, known as the 4S System. The 4S System identifies resources people use to cope. Each of these 4 crucial coping resources identified by Schlossberg are also highlighted as constructs in this study, tying the research questions to the Schlossberg coping framework. Situation is the type of transition (anticipated or unanticipated), the context in which the event occurs, and the impact of the transition on the individual's life. In the case of African American male college students, the situation is represented by their transition to a college campus and their pursuit to adapt to college life at a PWI. Self refers to the personal and demographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity, health, and socioeconomic status) that affect the perception of the event. For African American male students who are underrepresented at PWIs, demographic variables make their experiences unique compared to their White counterparts. Individuals also bring psychological resources to coping, such as self-concept and self-efficacy, which determine their global view. Self-concept is presented in the study as
Black identity, measured by centrality, private regard, and public regard (Sellers et al., 1998).

Support is the mobilization of the resources needed to share or eliminate stress. The types of support needed to get through a stressful event include family, friends and community. Schlossberg identifies support as a mechanism essential to adults in transition. The current study explores the social support system for African American male students, examining who they turn to for help as they move through the college experience. Strategies refer to the coping strategies each individual utilizes to prevent, ease, or otherwise respond to stress. In the case of the African American male college students included in this study, gender based coping and religious coping are measured to determine their association with academic outcomes. Goodman et al. (2006) asserted that the way in which an individual responds to a transitional event depends on their interaction and balance of the use of situation, self, supports, and strategies. This is particularly important since individuals perceive a transition differently and internalize the impact of the same event differently; past experience with a similar transition also determines how well a person can cope with the current transition (Goodman et al., 2006).

Schlossberg’s (1984) transition model was used as a framework for the current study as it provides a conceptual lens through which specific coping strategies can be examined that African American male college students use to mitigate challenges they experience. Schlossberg’s model is particularly salient for understanding African American male college students’ experiences at a PWI, given that there is likely a significant degree of variation in individual responses to the contextual challenges that may exist. Schlossberg’s theory, originally used to gauge transitions of aging adults, has
recently been applied to transitions of various groups into different settings, but not for transitions of African American men into PWI’s. For African American male college students at PWIs, adjustment and transition to college is unique and often viewed from a deficit approach, or by highlighting those factors that work to impede achievement. In contrast, Harper’s (2010) anti-deficit achievement framework takes a positive approach to understanding the experiences and achievement of African American male college students.

**Harper’s Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework (2010)**

A third framework employed to guide this study is Harper’s (2010) anti-deficit achievement framework, which explores the transition of African American male college students from a success prospective. The anti-deficit achievement framework is an alternative lens through which to view the experiences of African American men. Harper sought to elucidate successful coping strategies employed by African American male college students that help them navigate and achieve success in their college environments. While Harper’s (2010) framework includes three transitions: precollege, college, and postcollege, this study focused on transition in college. Harper’s framework centers on the concept of understanding Black achievement through college experiences of African American men and the avenues they take toward success. While Harper’s framework does not explicitly explore coping as route to academic achievement, he advocates a holistic approach to understanding the Black male experience that includes self-concept and perceptions of college experiences, both of which are significant components of the current research.
Harper’s (2010) anti-deficit approach framed research questions from a success perspective to better understand how college students of color navigate seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Harper’s framework is built upon a set of anti-deficit questions, derived from theories in psychology, sociology, and education. For example, reframing of a typical question surrounding the African American male college experience as outlined by Harper (2010) would be the following:

Deficit approach question: Why are Black male students’ rates of persistence and degree attainment lowest among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education?

Anti-deficit approach question: How did Black men manage to persist and earn their degrees, despite transition issues, racist stereotypes, academic under preparedness, and other negative forces?

The anti-deficit approach reevaluates the historically negative approach to the question of African American males’ college experiences by framing them as embodying positive achievement. In this study, constructs are measured to determine their relationship to GPA as a way to highlight successful coping strategies that effectively counter negative effects on GPA.

First used to study African American male college student achievement, Harper (2010) expanded his anti-deficit framework to explore the success of all students of color, primarily those majoring in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Most empirical studies amplify minority student deficits instead of achievement (Harper, 2010). Researchers generally miss or ignore an even more important phenomenon: why and how do some African American male and other minority college
students succeed? Harper’s anti-deficit approach sought to identify success mechanisms or factors that work in concert to elevate underrepresented college students beyond their circumstances.

Harper’s (2010) framework focused on the experiences of high-achieving African American men and also other students of color from 4-year institutions. His primary aim of reconceptualizing the approach to understanding the success of African American men in higher education is congruent with the intent of the present study, which sought to understand individual factors related to Black male student coping and achievement. The aim of Harper’s (2010) study was to understand why Black men succeed rather than why they fail. The anti-deficit achievement approach is applicable to the present study because of the focus on highlighting positive coping strategies that deflect distractions to achievement rather than focusing on contextual barriers to achievement, which much of the previous literature has done. Harper examined high achieving Black male college students at highly selective institutions, but the anti-deficit achievement framework has also been applied to other groups, including first-generation and low-income students (Harper, 2011). Fundamentally, the anti-deficit achievement theory, meant to expand on traditional persistence and achievement models criticized over their applicability to African American students, provides a base for understanding experiences that lead to achievement for African American males in the current study.

The three aforementioned models help to inform the current study. To understand the relevance of the constructs used in the study and their known impact on African American male college student achievement, the literature pertaining to the primary
constructs—social support, perceived racial discrimination, racial identity, coping, and religious coping—is reviewed next.

**Coping**

Coping strategies have been shown to offset effects of perceived negative events by offering a method for overcoming stressful life events such as those often experienced by African American men in their transition to and persistence through college. Coping is described in the literature as efforts used to manage, lessen, or endure the demands of situations that are perceived as stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For individuals at risk for negative outcomes, resources such as self-efficacy and coping skills can assist in managing stressful life events (Bandura, 2001; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Research shows that effective use of coping skills—cognitive or behavioral—may moderate the risk of harmful mental health outcomes in college students (MacCann, Fogarty, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2011). Therefore, it is important to study how African American male college students use coping strategies to manage stress associated with college transition.

Research indicates that coping is a multidimensional process reflective of the environment and its demands and resources as well as a person’s disposition that influences the appraisal of stress and resources for coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Whether or not an event becomes stressful depends on how much an individual perceives it will impact his or her life (Lazarus & Folkman 1984, p. 19). For instance, one person may internalize the same event differently than another, who may have had different life experiences that affect internalization.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) asserted that an individual’s commitment, or idea of what is important, is the motivator behind the choice that individuals make in how to
respond to a situation. A greater commitment to what is important in a situation could increase the potential for a threat or challenge appraisal but at the same time could also move individuals to some positive action. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) also pointed to individual beliefs about the personal or situational control over an event as another factor that may impact how people believe they can control the outcome of a particular stress event. Also, what may cause one person to become stressed and seek coping mechanisms may not have the same impact on another, so coping is based primarily on the unique experiences of each individual and the impression of the event and its effect on life (Lazarus, 2006). This characteristic is important because the current study focuses on the subgroup of African American male college students who experience unique circumstances at a PWI and who experience events differently from one another and from White students.

The current study focused on African American males; therefore, it is important to understand specific coping mechanisms utilized by men. Nolen-Hoeksema (1991) asserted that how people respond to their depressed moods influences the severity and duration of their moods. In general, women respond to their depressed moods less adaptively than men, yielding higher rates of depression in women than in men (Nolen-Hoeksema, Morrow, & Fredrickson 1993). Nolen-Hoeksema’s (1991) response style theory (RST) highlights two types of responses to coping with depressed moods—rumination and distraction. Rumination and distraction refer to how people respond to negative moods, not necessarily individuals with diagnosed depression. Rumination is defined as “behaviors and thoughts that focus one’s attention on one’s depressive symptoms and on the implications of these symptoms” (i.e. thinking about how sad one
feels) (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991, p. 569). Those who use ruminative responses when encountering depressed moods consistently think about their feelings and participate in behaviors that allow them to focus on their depressed moods, such as isolating themselves from others. Focusing on the inward internal depressed state causes the depression to worsen over time (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991).

The use of ruminative cognitions is related to higher levels of depressive symptoms over time (e.g., Nolen-Hoeksema, & Morrow, 1991; Nolen-Hoeksema, Morrow, & Fredrickson, 1993; Pyszczcynski & Greenberg, 1987). These individuals also have difficulty with problem solving (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995; Lyubomirsky, Tucker, Caldwell, & Berg, 1999), and often are clinically depressed (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000). Of the two coping mechanisms defined by Nolen-Hoeksema (1991), rumination and distraction, rumination is identified as prolonging and intensifying depressed moods.

In contrast, distractive coping has a more positive outcome, allowing individuals to move thoughts to activities that create more pleasant feelings. Nolen-Hoeksema (1990) made a distinction between distracting responses from those that characterize a repressive defense style (Weinberger & Davidson, 1994), which is identified by a lack of awareness and denial of personal experiences of trauma. Nolen-Hoeksema (1990) asserted that the use of distracting responses means that a person has evaluated and is aware of the depressive symptoms. In addition, the person then sets out to relieve the negative feelings by participating in positive distracting thoughts and activities.

For men who embody a traditional male gender role, the use of distractive coping is likely, since rumination would conflict with the non-emotional role often defined by
masculinity norms (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008). Distractive coping is more commensurate with action-focused masculine norms because the strategies allow individuals to move attention away from stressful situations or thoughts to those that do not promote stressful thoughts, such exercising with a run, walk or swim; focusing on a home project; or spending time with friends (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). Such activities may allow men to cope more positively with stress or depression.

Distractive coping has been linked to better mental health, evidence in the literature suggests. Distraction increases the amount of pleasant activity in which an individual participates (Morrow & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1990). Further, distractive coping is a behavior that has been associated with avoiding harmful mental health issues (Huffziger, Reinhard & Kuehner, 2009; Li, DiGiuseppe, & Froh, 2006; Lyubomirsky, Caldwell, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998; Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995; Nolen-Hoeksema & Morrow, 1993). Also, evidence suggests that girls rely more heavily on social support and hopeful belief strategies to cope with stress, and boys use more avoidance coping strategies, such suppression, diversion, or even sports and other recreational activities to deal with unwanted situations (Frydenberg, 1997). This finding is somewhat contrary to Nolen-Hoeksema’s (1994) assertion that men handle stress more positively than women. While research indicates men more often use positive distractive coping, the literature also indicates such behavior could be negative. A focused understanding of the use of coping strategies by African American male college students would provide better characterization of their path and achievement in higher education. This study, therefore, contributes to the literature by having investigated the unique coping experiences of
African American male undergraduates and how strategies they endorse are related to variation in achievement.

**Religious Coping**

The relationship between religion and African Americans is deeply rooted. Religion is uniquely significant in the lives of African Americans (Herndon, 2003). The Black church has historically been the backbone for African Americans and the African American community (Dillard, 2007; Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2004). During the Civil Rights Movement, the Black church served as the glue that bound the African American community together, and Black clergy were at the forefront of the movement for equality.

Although the body of research on Black male student achievement includes external approaches to addressing academic challenges, few studies have examined Black male college students’ internal coping strategies, particularly religious coping despite the evidence that religion is a particularly ubiquitous aspect of African American life (Taylor & Chatters, 1991; Taylor et al., 2004). Most of the previous research has centered on strategies higher education administrators and student life professionals might use to address the external and structural variables known to enable persistence. However, internal coping strategies such as religious coping as a means to negotiate college achievement for African American male college students may also be important factors to examine (Riggins, McNeal, & Herndon, 2008).

For instance, Kuh and Gonyea (2005) found that involvement in spiritual activities during college was linked to a deepener sense of spirituality for various groups of students. However, within the sample African American students reported deriving the most benefit from spirituality. This is an important finding because it offers some insight
into possible successful coping strategies of African American male college students. More importantly, the it highlights the need for further examination of possibility that religious coping may be employed as a coping strategy and importantly, related to academic performance among African American male college students.

Research shows that religion plays a role in coping with life stressors. Specifically, among ethnic minorities and those who encounter life crises, religion has reportedly been the greatest source for coping (Bulman & Wortman, 1977; Conway, 1985-1986). Moreover, religious coping has been connected to a number of salient outcomes, including lower rates of depression (Koenig, et al., 1992); greater mental health (Pargament et al., 1994) and physical health (McIntosh & Spilka, 1990; Pressman, Lyons, Larson, & Strain, 1990); stress-related growth (Park & Cohen, 1993), spiritual fulfillment (Pargament, 1990); and reduced rates of mortality (Oxman, Freeman, & Manheimer, 1995; Zuckerman, Kasl, & Ostfeld, 1984). Research indicates that these effects remain significant after controlling for socioeconomic and demographic variables, global religious measures, and nonreligious coping measures (Pargament, 1997).

Religious coping has been established as a meaningful resource for individuals attempting to understand and deal with difficult times in their lives. Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick (1985) identified three roles that religion plays in the coping process: (a) it offers meaning to life, (b) it provides the individual a greater sense of control over his or her situations, and (c) it builds self-esteem. Thus, those who turn to religion can assess different religious coping resources from the spiritual, cognitive, behavioral, and social aspects of their faith when encountering stressful situations (Hathaway & Pargament, 1992).
The study of religious coping as a means of curbing stress has evolved over the past two decades. Pargament (1997) emerged as one of the primary researchers in the area of religious coping. He asserted that religious coping methods mediate the relationship between an individual’s general religious orientation and the outcomes of major life events. When facing stressful life events, individuals must translate general religious beliefs and practices into specific forms of coping. It is these specific coping methods that appear to have the most direct implications for an individual’s health during stressful times. Pargament (1997) described religious coping as the use of religion adaptively, to actively cope with and grapple with life’s problems of pain and suffering. Religious problem solving strategies originate from a more general orienting system that includes established traits, beliefs, practices, attitudes, goals, and values (Pargament, 1997). Religious coping is, therefore, a recognized form of coping that seeks to make sense of, to deal with, and to manage stressful life situations in a specific situational context.

Like other forms of coping, religious coping is also considered a process. Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez (1998) recognized that religion serves a number of purposes in daily life as well as in crisis situations in their description of the five religious coping functions that constitute the conceptualization and development of the RCOPE instrument (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000). These functions are meaning, control, comfort/spirituality, intimacy/spirituality, and life transformation.

According to Pargament (1997) and Pargament et al. (1998), meaning—understanding and interpretation—is offered by religion in the face of suffering and baffling life experiences. Religion offers avenues to achieve a sense of control when
individuals are confronted with events that push them beyond their own resources; religion offers avenues to achieve a sense of control. *Comfort/spirituality* refers to the yearning to connect with a force that goes beyond the individual self; this is the most basic function of religion (Johnson, 1959). *Intimacy/spirituality* refers to the social solidarity and social identity fostered by religion: intimacy with others is often encouraged through spiritual methods, such as offers of spiritual help to others and spiritual support from clergy or members. Religion might also assist people in making major *life transformations*; that is, giving up old objects of value and finding new sources of significance (Pargament, 1997).

Pargament (1997) also identified three religious problem solving styles: (a) self-directing, in which an individual sees himself or herself, not God, as responsible for solving problems; (b) collaborative, where an individual sees God as a partner; and (3) deferring, in which an individual turns all responsibility for managing problems over to God. In the self-directing style, the responsibility for managing the problem is solely on the individual who is actively engaged in solving the problem. In the collaborative style, the individual shares responsibility in solving the problem with God, and both are active players in the problem-solving process. In the deferring style, the responsibility for solving the problem is left to God, with the individual inactive in the process. (Fox, Blanton, & Morris, 1998). Thus, the three styles represent positions on a continuum of locus of responsibility and level of activity as the person works through the problem.

Religious coping strategies may be of particular benefit to African American students. Research has determined that some African American college students, particularly those enrolled at PWIs, turn to religion and spirituality to overcome the
challenges that they face in their primarily White college environments (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Dancy, 2010). Constantine, Wilton, Gainor and Lewis (2002) studied the relationships among religion, spirituality, and coping strategies in 144 African American college students at three different PWIs and found correlations between higher levels of spirituality, the use of spiritual-centered African-cultural coping mechanisms, and collaborative and deferring religious problem-solving styles. Constantine et al. (2002) also showed a relationship between participation in religious events or programs and higher levels of spirituality. In addition, lower use of self-directing religious problem-solving styles and cognitive and emotional debriefing coping mechanisms were associated with higher levels of spirituality. These findings offer evidence that African Americans may rely more on spirituality and less on outside help from trained mental health professionals.

Might religious coping be related to academic achievement? In another study, Walker and Dixon (2002) explored spirituality and academic performance and found a significant correlation between the grades of African American students and spirituality. Given documented barriers to higher education for African American males and the historic importance of religion to African Americans, the current study examined the role religious coping might play in adjustment and achievement, in addition to other factors, such as discrimination and identity.

Racial Discrimination

For African American men attending PWIs, coping and adjusting to college life while going through the process of developing a strong sense of self may require significant balancing in an unfamiliar climate. Developing coping strategies and adjusting
is a rite of passage for college students. Research indicates, however, that African American students who enter a PWI face a unique adjustment process (Allen, 1992). In addition to the normal adjustment that comes with transitioning to college, African American men often encounter race-related discrimination and stress that affect their overall lifestyle and could impact achievement.

Hall and Rowan (2001) concluded that African American males are discriminated against at PWIs. Racial discrimination is described as unfair treatment on the basis of race that puts one racial group at a disadvantage (National Research Council, 2004). Studies show that African American college students report feelings of isolation, alienation, and a general lack of support (Allen, 1985, 1992; Kenny & Stryker, 1996). Some argue that the hurdles African American men face are part of structural racism and provide yet another source of stress for Blacks (Jackson & Volckens, 1998). The present study examined the relationship between perceived discrimination and academic achievement of African American male college students toward better understanding of the impact of discrimination on college outcomes for this particular group of students.

The literature on stress and coping indicates that racial discrimination falls into two categories: major life events and daily racial “hassles” (Harrell, 1997; Sellers et al., 2003). A major life event is one that seriously impacts one’s life, such as an assault based on race (Harrell, 2000). While such overt, physical attacks may not be frequent, literature reflects that African Americans experience subtle forms of discrimination, or daily racial “hassles,” characterized by discriminatory practices that may be considered a nuisance rather than traumatic when assessed individually (Harrell, 2000). These smaller but more frequent events might include a Black individual being pulled over by the police while
driving, or being overlooked in a classroom by a professor or by peers. Such events reflect systematic and institutional attitudes (Harrell, 1997).

The literature refers to these encounters as “racial microaggressions” (Harrell, 2000), which nevertheless can often be traumatic (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). Harrell (2000) described racial microaggressions as the normal everyday experiences of racism, such as subtle invalidations (i.e., being passed by a taxi driver in an empty cab, mistaken for a bus boy, or followed by plain clothes security in a department store). These events are not considered major discrimination events but if the events occur regularly in the college environment, they could have an effect on African American male student transition and adjustment to college. Researchers have suggested that frequent, although small, discriminatory events often have a lifetime impact on African Americans (Harrell, 2000; Williams, Spencer, & Jackson, 1999). African Americans face subtler daily racial hassles than major life events, but these smaller, more frequent events have been shown to affect overall health (Harrell, 2000) and may also affect the achievement of African American male college students.

Evidence has been presented that the reported discrimination that African American students encounter on college campuses creates added race related stress. Utsey (1999) defined race-related stress as a discomfort experienced by African Americans who observe or directly experience racial discrimination in their daily lives at the individual, cultural, or institutional levels. In Feagin and Sikes’ (1995) qualitative study of student experiences of racism on predominantly White campuses, African American students reported their ideas were dismissed in classes, that they were often mistaken for other Black students, and that their professors dissuaded them from
speaking on topics that caused discomfort. In addition, Black students reported feeling like outsiders at PWIs (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Further, Fleming (1984) found that Black students believed that they were disrespected at PWIs. Literature also suggests that African American students perceive their interaction with White students as being hostile, distant, and unfriendly, and that often the Black students are avoided (Allen, 1988; Asante & Al-Deen, 1984; Britt & Turner, 2002).

In a focus group study by Hall and Rowan (2001) Black male participants reported discrimination and racism in academic and social environments at PWIs. The findings revealed that study participants experienced indifferent treatment as a normative experience within the environment. Reported racism was a significant barrier to their academic persistence (Hall & Rowan, 2001). In addition, Allen and Haniff (1991) asserted that because Black students attending PWIs encounter these added adjustments to a climate that is culturally, academically, and socially challenging they also do not experience higher academic success. Thus, the current study examined the relationship between academic achievement among African American male college students and the discrimination that they report having experienced while in college.

**Racial Identity**

The empirical literature connecting African American adolescent identity to academic achievement has been somewhat inconsistent. Limited evidence exists for the relationship between academic achievement and racial identity for African American youth (Prelow, Bowman, & Weaver, 2001). However, some researchers have found evidence that for African American adolescents, ethnic identification (e.g., feeling close
to members of their own ethnic group) was positively related to school grades and provided a buffer against perceived discrimination from teachers and peers (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). In addition, Helms (1990) pointed out that a primary identity issue for African Americans is the development of a positive sense of self. If developed by African American male college students, a positive sense of self could translate to greater academic achievement.

A distinction must be drawn between ethnic and racial identity theories. While ethnic identity theories and models offer insight into the process of development of racial minorities (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Phinney, 1989), racial identity theory—specifically, Black racial identity theory—assesses the development of young African Americans moving from adolescence to adulthood. Racial identity is defined as “a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (Helms, 1990, p. 3). Therefore, developing a strong sense of racial identity development may give African American male college students another tool to endure stressful events they may encounter at PWIs.

Black identity development theory has progressed from stage models that assume African Americans go through stages in their development to endorsing group identity to more recently developed theories that include multidimensional views of racial identity encompassing varying dimensions (Sellers et al., 1998). Early racial identity theory was based on a Black self-hatred perspective developed directly following the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. This theory posited that Blacks go through a Nigrescence (Cross, 1971) process of resocialization from self-hatred to Black pride and self-love.
In contrast, the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) introduced by Sellers et al. (1998), which was used in this study, is different from the earlier stage approach to racial identity. Sellers, Smith, et al. (1998) offered an integrative framework that assumes African Americans have individual and varying perspectives that affect their identity development. This model sought to address inconsistencies within the racial identity literature by exploring several dimensions of racial identity. Other models of racial identity indicate stage processes. In contrast, the MMRI investigates a number of aspects of African American identity: salience, centrality, regard, and ideology. The current study assessed racial identity with the MMRI because it conceptualizes different aspects of an individual’s racial identity (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998).

The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997) is a measure of the constructs conceptualized in the MMRI. Sellers, Smith, et al. (1998) asserted that racial identity allows for mechanisms through which African Americans define themselves in comparison to other racial groups. This identity refers to how Blacks see themselves and the world around them. Sellers, Smith, et al. (1998) offered a heuristic model of African American racial identity to (a) examine the influence of race from the perspective that African Americans define themselves, (b) observe how identity develops across the life span, and (c) predict how racial identity influences the way Blacks perceive and interact with the environment.

The model is based on four assumptions. First, like other aspects of self-concept, racial identity has properties that are both situational and stable and that interact to influence individuals’ behavior in certain situations. Second, individuals have various identities that are ordered hierarchically within the self-concept. Third, the
phenomenological approach to understanding racial identity is important for exploring people’s perception of their racial identity without the use of objective criteria that may present a healthy or skewed racial identity over an unhealthy one. Fourth, racial identity is a complex component of African American self-concept, is multidimensional, and manifests in various ways in behavioral and adaptation outcomes (Sellers, Smith, et al. 1998).

Sellers, Smith et al. (1998) defined Black racial identity in the MMRI as the significance and qualitative meaning that individuals attribute to their membership within the Black racial group within their self-concepts. The four dimensions of racial identity, Sellers, Smith, et al. (1998) argued, are independent, but interrelated. The dimensions include (a) identity salience, (b) centrality of the identity, (c) the regard in which the person holds African Americans, and (d) racial ideology. Racial salience refers to the extent to which an individual’s race is a part of his or her self-concept at a particular moment or in a given situation. Centrality refers to the extent to which a person sees himself or herself with regard to race. Racial regard refers to affective and evaluative judgments of one’s race. Regard consists of private regard—the extent to which individuals feel positively or negatively towards African Americans or about being an African American, and public regard—the extent to which individuals feel that others view African Americans positively or negatively.

Ideology refers to an individual’s beliefs, opinions, and attitudes about how other African Americans should behave and embodies nationalist, oppressed minority, assimilation, and humanist philosophies. The nationalist ideology emphasizes the uniqueness of being Black. The oppressed minority ideology considers the similarities
between the oppression that African Americans and other minority groups face. The assimilationist ideology considers the similarities between African Americans and other segments of American society. The humanist ideology considers the similarities among all humans. Racial salience and centrality are concerned with the significance of race in an individual’s life, while the regard and ideology dimensions focus on the meaning of being Black.

The MMRI (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998) is important because it identifies the extent to which centrality and public and private regard play roles in the achievement of African American male college students at PWIs. The current study focuses on the centrality and regard aspects of the MMRI. Identity development is critical for those moving from adolescence to adulthood. The process of racial identity development may be unique for African American men attending PWIs because they must navigate the subtleties and nuances of a predominantly White college setting. The racial identity process is important for emerging African American males who are developing a sense of self while navigating an environment in which racial identity may serve as an internal resource that aids their college achievement by providing a strong sense of self in a context that may not be validating. Other resources may assist African American male college students as well, such as social support.

Social Support

The literature on social support is vast, and much of it examines social support without consideration of differences based on race or gender. Social support is defined as perceived support, or perceived emotional support, or an individual having at least one person in whom to confide (Jackson, 1992). Familial support and social support are
often used interchangeably (Kiecolt et al., 2008). Family and social support are defined as the existence or quantity of social ties or relationships and the frequency of contact (House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988). In the current study, family support was defined as the perception by African American male college students that they are being cared for and encouraged by family and peers while in college.

Especially in high stress situations, in which African American male college students are negotiating their new campus life and moving from adolescence into adulthood, family support may be sought as a means of coping and adjusting. There is general consensus among researchers that individuals more often look for support from their family than friends (Pinkerton & Dolan, 2007). Research shows that family support is a positive influence on young, emerging adults. Hamdan-Mansour, Puskar, and Sereika (2007) found that perceived familial social support was a strong protective factor for alcoholism in adolescents. Hovey and Seligman (2007) found that greater family support was significantly associated with lower instances of depression and anxiety in college students. Family as a strong support system may also influence achievement outcomes for African American male college students.

The current literature on the influence of familial support on college students’ grades, however, is conflicting. While some studies conclude that there are no significant correlations between family support and academic performance, others have reported the opposite. For instance, Roman, Cuestas, & Fenollar (2008) found no significant link between familial support and college students’ academic achievement. However, Roman et al. found that family support was associated with students’ self-esteem and their
learning styles. This finding may be linked to academic achievement, but a direct link between family support and academic achievement was not found.

A number of studies have highlighted the significant link between familial support and college student GPA. In one study of African American college students, Babaoye (2001) reported that African American college students described family support as a factor that played a role in their academic performance. The study, however, did not indicate how much or how little family support contributed to the participants’ academic success. Similarly, Moody (2000) interviewed African American college students and found that parental support was crucial in their academic achievement; participants suggested that the nurturing they received from parents was instrumental to their college persistence. Other research showed that for college students who attempt to assimilate into their new college life, regular interaction with those outside of the college environment hindered academic success (Kao, 2001). Further, there is evidence that integration into the college environment increased the chance of college success (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). Therefore, the extant literature is indeterminate with regard to whether family support may or may not influence college student achievement. The current study will help add clarification to this body of research by examining the relationship between family support among African American male college students at PWIs, for whom family support may be particularly salient.

College students, however, spend much more of their time at college with peers than family. Therefore, friends often have a major influence on the social and academic adjustment of students at college. Supportive friends can fill a void by reducing loneliness and alienation that college students might experience and provide relationships
that allow students to express personal feelings (Jay & D'Augelli, 1991; Tinto, 1987; Vaux, 1988). The literature consistently points to student integration and involvement in the college social environment as critical to the commitment to the academic institution (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1993). Important to social adjustment is students’ integration into the college life, in which they form networks as well as navigate social freedoms. Gerdes and Maillinckrodt (2000) found having emotional and social support influenced successful adjustment to college academically, socially, and psychologically. According to the literature, it is a necessity for students to have strong social networks in order to adjust to their new college life.

For underrepresented African American male college students seeking to adjust to a PWI, peer support may be even more critical than for other students. Recent studies indicate a connection between peer support and academic performance of ethnic minority students (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Kao, 2001; Schneider & Ward, 2003). Gloria et al. (2005) found that among Hispanic students perceived social support from friends was one of the strongest predictors of college persistence. In addition, Schneider and Ward (2003) found that peer support and academic performance were positively correlated. Nagasawa and Wong (1999) found a number of benefits of minority students establishing a social support network with other ethnic minorities. A peer support system allows students to integrate into the college social and academic life, which Tinto (1993) suggested increases the chances of academic success. Peer support can be a crucial form of social support for underrepresented African American males attending PWIs; these students are searching for a sense of belonging in an unfamiliar setting.
In summary, the literature points to a number of strategies that African American males may use in their pathway through college. Unfortunately, the extant literature includes few studies that examine all of the factors within one model that have been identified as important. In particular, coping strategies have been missing from several previous investigations of African American male achievement in college. The current study sought to examine the relationship between GPA and social support, perceived racial discrimination, racial identity development, coping, and religious coping in an effort to better elucidate achievement among African American males attending predominantly White institutions. The study purpose was to identify those constructs that explained variance in achievement to inform interventions and integration programs. In addition, knowledge gained from this study will add depth to the current body of literature on African American male college student achievement.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The present study investigated the relationship among coping strategies employed by African American male college students, college experiences, and self-reported academic achievement, measured by GPA. The study included the use of coping by African American males to contribute to the understanding of this population of students who are negotiating postsecondary academic settings while transitioning into adulthood.

Sample

The sample for this study came from a larger study on race, ethnicity, gender, and coping with negative mood among a diverse group of college students at two large, predominantly White universities in the Midwest (Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007). The purpose of the larger study was to investigate phenomena that impacted the psychological health and well-being of diverse college students, particularly underrepresented students, as they negotiate the college environment. The eligibility criteria for the original study was that participants had to be students attending college and over the age of 18, therefore able to consent to participation. Study participants for the current study included 128 African American males drawn from a total sample of 654 students. The overall sample in the larger study was comprised of 413 women and 241 men (Thomas, Hammond, & Kohn-Wood, 2014).

Procedure

Following IRB approval at both institutions, study participants were recruited using differing methods to ensure a diverse sample (Thomas et al., 2014). At one university, some participants were recruited through the psychology department subject
Other students on both campuses were recruited through advertisements on posters and individual and group recruitment by researchers on campus. In addition, researchers contacted student groups with predominantly African American membership. Students who agreed to participate in the study signed consent forms and then completed a set of self-report measures. Each student was also given a debriefing form with a list of mental health resources. Depending on how they were recruited, students were offered compensation in the form of cash ($10), food, food coupons, or course credit. Those participants who reported experiences of negative moods were also offered the opportunity to receive assistance by making an appointment at their university counseling center (Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007).

**Measures**

Instruments selected for the present study have been used in a number of previous studies to measure the constructs. The instruments have undergone significant psychometric development.

**Demographics**

Age, maternal education (as a proxy for socioeconomic status), and campus location (of the two universities) were included in this study. Age is measured continuously in years. The level of mother’s educational achievement was used due to the lack of reliability for self-reported family income data. Mother’s education is measured categorically, including “some high school,” “high school diploma,” “some college,” and “college diploma.” The level of mothers’ educational achievement was used due to the lack of reliability for self-reported family income data.
Social Support

Participants’ sources of social support were assessed with an 18-item support scale. Each item was rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale: (0) none, (1) rarely, (2) a little, (3) sometimes, (4) often, (5) always, and (9) non-applicable. The question stated, “How much do you rely on the following people for support?” The measure was adapted from a social support measure used in a previous study by researchers examining mental health and discrimination among African Americans (Banks, Kohn-Wood & Spencer, 2006). Adaptations for the present study included sources of social support that may be specific to an on-campus college student population. These components included a roommate(s), professor or graduate student assistant(s), resident assistant(s), and counselor or therapist. These four components of the support scale were extracted because of their relatedness to on campus support and these scales were used in the analyses for the present study. Adequate internal reliability was determined for the current sample ($\alpha=.80$).

Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination was measured by the Daily Life Experience subscale, which is part of the larger Racism and Life Events Scale (Harrell, 1997). The scale is a self-report measure of the frequency of 18 everyday discrimination events with adequate reliability. Participants are asked how often they experience each racial hassle. Responses for the frequency of each event range from (0) never happened to (5) once a week or more. Scores are averaged to generate a range of 0-5. Representative items include “being treated rudely or disrespectfully,” and “Others expecting your work to be inferior.” Previous studies have found more than adequate reliability for this measure with African Americans (Harrell, 1997). A study that examined racial discrimination and depressive
symptoms and masculine role norms in African American men (Hammond, 2012) had a Cronbach alpha of 0.95 of reliability consistency. Items on the discrimination scale also exhibited strong internal consistency for the current study sample ($\alpha = .93$).

**Racial Identity**

Racial identity is measured using the short form of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) (Sellers et al., 1997). The MIBI is a pencil-and-paper measure with 11 items measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Responses range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). For the current study, the centrality, private regard, and public regard scales were the only scales used. These three subscales are representative of constructs considered stable in the conceptualization of the MMRI. The three subscales used in this study assess individuals’ perceptions of their racial identity. Sellers et al. (1997) described the content validity of the MIBI through factor analytic evidence and showed a moderate relationship between centrality, public regard and private regard subscales of the instrument ($r=.46$). In addition, Cronbach alpha for centrality, public regard and private regard subscales was established as .83, .81, and 84 respectively (Sellers et al., 1997). In a study exploring the racial and gender identity of a sample of African American male college students (Thomas, Hammond, & Wood, 2014), the three MIBI subscales also showed adequate internal consistency: centrality ($\alpha=.61$), private regard ($\alpha=.64$, public regard ($\alpha=.68$). Descriptions of each subscale and the internal consistency reliability for this study are described.

**Centrality.** Centrality was measured using the centrality subscale from the MIBI. This scale is comprised of 4 items. The scale measures the degree to which individuals view race as critical to their self-concept (current sample $\alpha = .63$). Representative items...
include “Being Black is an important reflection of who I am” and “I have a strong sense of belonging to Black people.”

**Private regard.** This 3-item scale examines the extent to which participants feel positively or negatively about their race and other African Americans (current sample $\alpha = .77$). Representative items include “I feel good about Black people” and “I am proud to be Black.”

**Public regard.** This is a 4-item MIBI subscale that measures participants’ perceptions, negative or positive, of how African Americans are viewed by others (current sample $\alpha = .65$). The scale consists of representative items including “In general, others respect Black people” and “Society views Black people as an asset.”

**Coping**

Coping responses were measured using an adapted Daily Emotion Report (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 1993), a version of the Response Style Questionnaire (Nolen-Hoeksema & Morrow, 1991). It was originally designed to validate empirically the response style theory. It was composed with the ruminative scale and the distractive scale. The present study only uses the distractive coping styles measure because of the two styles, it is the one most often exercised by men (Hoeksema, Morrow, & Fredrickson, 1993).

Individuals describe their most recent stressful event and the emotions they experience. In this measure, they then rate the duration of their feelings using an 11-point Likert scale ranging from *a few minutes* (0) to *all of the day* (10) and the severity of their moods using an 11-point Likert scale ranging from *just a little depressed* (0) to *extremely sad/depressed.*
The RSQ has shown to have acceptable validity and acceptable internal reliability and test-retest reliability. For the original 10 item distractive scale, the reported internal consistency (Cronbach’s coefficient alpha) was .89 and test-retest reliability was .62 (Nolen-Hoeksema & Morrow, 1991).

**Distractive Scale.** Analyses included participants’ responses on the scale of distractive coping (Nolan-Hoeksema et al., 1993). On this scale, participants indicate their level of distractive responses by checking off items from a list of responses from the Daily Emotion Report (Nolan-Hoeksema et al., 1993). High scores on the Distraction Scale indicate that participants engage in thoughts that take their minds off their negative feelings. Examples of responses include behaviors such as “Go to sleep to escape how I feel” and thoughts such as “These feelings won’t last.” Items on the distractive coping scale exhibited adequate internal consistency for the current study sample (α = .79).

**Religious Coping**

For the Religious Problem Solving Scale (Pargament et al., 1988), each item is scored on a 4-point Likert scale and responses range from (1) *a great deal* (4) *not at all*. The Religious Problem Solving Scale consists of three subscales that measure Pargament's conceptualization of the different dimensions of religious problem solving: passive deferring, active collaborative, and self-directed (Pargament, et al. 1988). The current study uses an adapted 9-item measure, reduced from Pargament’s original scale. The current scale was adapted to include those coping responses endorsed most often by college students. In a previous study on coping styles of emerging African American adults using the same 9-item measure, the internal consistency of each of the religious coping subscales, active, passive, and self-directed also showed good internal consistency.
(\(\alpha = 0.93\), \(\alpha = 0.89\), and \(\alpha = 0.88\), respectively). A review of the original measure by the authors of the internal consistency of the scales using Cronbach’s alpha showed high reliability for the three scales .91 (Deferring), .94 (Collaborative), and .94 (Self-Directing) (Pargament et al. 1988). Taitel, Kooistra, and Hathaway (1987) conducted a test-retest reliability analysis of the scales over a one week period among a sample of 97 college students. The reliability estimates were .93 (Collaborative), .94 (Self-Directing), and .87 (Deferring). Cronbach’s alpha for the measure for the current study are described.

Passive religious deferral, which is the extent to which the individual wholeheartedly depends on God or a Higher Power to solve the problem (current sample \(\alpha =.90\)), is assessed by the 3-item Passive Religious Deferral subscale. A representative item of this subscale is “Didn't do much, just expected God or Higher Power to solve my problems for me.” Collaborative religious coping is measured with the Collaborative Religious Coping Scale, a 3-item subscale assessing the extent to which the individual worked collaboratively with God or a higher power to solve the problem (current sample \(\alpha =.92\)). Representative items of this subscale include “Did my best then turned the situation over to God or Higher Power” and “Took control over what I could, and gave the rest up to God or Higher Power.” The Self- Directed Religious Coping subscale is a 3-item subscale assessing the extent to which the individual takes personal responsibility for life's problems without relying on God (current sample \(\alpha =.91\)). Representative items from this subscale include “Tried to make sense of the situation without relying on God or a Higher Power.”
**Preliminary Analysis**

A priori power analysis was performed to determine the minimum sample size necessary to find the significant effect for the multiple regression analysis. Using $R^2$ of .25, a significance level ($\alpha$) of .05, an acceptable power of .80 (Cohen, 1992), and 12 predictors, a prior power analysis using GPOWER (Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996) determined that a minimum sample size of 64 would be needed to determine significance of the overall model predicting academic achievement and using the 12 predictors. Figure G2 shows the power in function of the sample size.

Mean substitution method, a widely-used estimation technique that imputes the mean of the non-missing values for the variable of interest into each instance of missing data (Gibson & Olejnik, 2003) was utilized in this study to retain sample size ($n=128$). This approach uses the rationale proposed by Wilks (1932) that when no other information is available, the mean provides the best estimate for any normally distributed variable. Analysis determined that the values missing from the data were minimal (7.7%), which falls in the acceptable range previously established by researchers. Bennett (2001) concluded that when more than 10% of data is missing, statistical analyses are likely to be biased; and others have used 20% (Peng, Harwell, & Ehman, 2006).

Results of analysis where cases with missing values are deleted (a default function for SPSS), resulting in a reduced sample size, are presented for comparison. The resulting data has adequate statistical power to detect the effects of interests as shown through power analysis, indicating a desired sample size of 64.
Data Analyses

First, descriptive characteristics of the sample were analyzed, including all relevant demographic variables. Next, characteristics of each independent variable and the outcome variable were examined, including the range, mean, and median of each variable and correlations among them: (a) social support, (b) experiences of racial discrimination, (c) racial identity, (d) distractive coping, and (e) religious coping strategies.

Research Question 1: What are the associations between academic achievement as measured by self-reported GPA and social support, experience of perceived racial discrimination, racial identity, coping, and religious coping strategies among African American male college students at two PWIs.

To answer the first research question, multiple linear regression analysis was utilized to examine variance in the dependent variable (GPA), as explained by each of the independent variables of social support, experiences of racial discrimination, racial identity, coping, and religious coping. The procedure included demographics and location as covariates and the independent variables of interest entered in the regression model. In the backward deletion model, all independent variables were included in the full model. At each step, the variable that was least significant (with the highest $p$ value) was removed until all remaining variables were significant.

Research Question 2: Does religious and distractive coping moderate the experience of discrimination and academic achievement among African American male college students who utilize coping mechanisms compared to those who do not?
To answer the second research question, interaction variables were created between experiences of racial discrimination and distractive coping, and experiences of racial discrimination and religious coping. These interaction variables along with discrimination, distractive coping and religious coping, were entered in the regression model. Model statistics, the amount of explained variance, and interaction were examined. In addition, all coefficients were examined to determine the direction, magnitude, and significance of each independent variable.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Demographic Characteristics

Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine participants’ demographic characteristics. The assessed characteristics were age, mother’s education, and location of institution attended. Students ranged in age from 18 to 34, but the median age was slightly above 20 ($M = 20.39, SD = 2.34$). On average, mother’s education, used in this study as a proxy for respondents’ socioeconomic status, fell in the range of “some college” ($M = 2.11, SD = .893$). The respondents were nearly evenly split between the two universities in this study, 66 (51.6%) and 62 (48.4%). Table F1 (Appendix F) illustrates the results.

Study Variables

Descriptive statistics were calculated for each study variable, including GPA, social support, racial discrimination, racial identity (centrality, private and public regard), coping (distractive), and religious coping (passive religious deferral, active collaborative, and self-directed). Demographic variables include age and mother’s education (as a proxy for SES).

As measured by the social support scale, respondents reported varying degrees of social support from the different sources assessed by the 7-point Likert-adapted social support subscales. The majority of respondents reported receiving some support from roommates (61.7%). More than half of respondents reported support from professors (59.4%). However, results show that respondents generally did not receive support from
the other two types of resources measured. Most of the respondents (59.4\%) reported that they received no support from resident assistants, while a majority (65.6\%) reported no support from a counselor or therapist.

As measured by the racial discrimination scale, on average students reported experiencing racial discrimination “a few times” during the previous year ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.0$). The values ranged from (0) \textit{never happened} to (5) \textit{once a week or more}. The most frequently reported racial discrimination event was “others reacting as afraid or intimidated” ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.59$), followed by “being stared at by strangers” ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.52$), and “being observed or followed in public” ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.49$).

The racial discrimination events were also recoded into dichotomous variables (0 = \textit{never experienced}, 1 = \textit{all other variables}) to gain a greater understanding of how many of the 18 discrimination events were experienced by each respondent. Results from this analysis showed that each respondent experienced a number of racially discriminating events with about a quarter of the respondents reporting experiencing all 18 of the discriminatory events within the previous year ($n = 51, 39.8\%$). Nearly 70\% of respondents ($n = 89, 69.5\%$) reported experiencing between 15 and 18 of the discriminatory events. Only two respondents (1.6\%) reported never experiencing any of the 18 racially discriminatory events within the previous year. Overall, African American male students experienced frequent racially discriminatory events “a few times a year.”

Regarding racial identity as measured by the racial identity adapted scale, the values ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). On two of the racial identity subscales participants’ scores were closest to the higher end of the scale. These were centrality ($M = 5.9$, $SD = 1.0$) and private regard ($M = 6.2$, $SD = 1.09$). For public
regard, however, scores fell slightly below the midpoint ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 1.1$). These scores indicate that participants report higher levels of private regard, or positive feelings about African Americans, and higher levels of centrality, or the importance of their race to them, in comparison to lower levels of public regard, or participants sense of that others hold positive feelings toward African Americans.

Regarding coping, as measured by the coping response scale, respondents reported that they rarely engaged in distractive coping, e.g. thoughts and behaviors that took their minds off their negative feelings. For instance, 98 respondents (76.6%) responded that they had not reacted to negative moods by “read[ing] something entertaining to get my attention away from my mood.” Similarly, more than half of the respondents (%) answered that they had engaged in coping strategies characterized by distraction thoughts. In contrast, however, one item on the distractive coping (thought) subscale did garner relatively higher levels of responses. A majority of respondents ($n = 80, 62.5\%$) reported engaging in distractive thoughts characterized by the item “I’ve got to get up and do something to make myself feel better” when confronted with a distressing situation.

The religious coping subscale measured religious coping on a scale from (1) a great deal to (4) not at all. Respondents reported on average using the active collaboration coping strategy most often ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.04$). In addition, respondents reported using self-directing religious coping strategies at a similarly high rate ($M = 2.9$, $SD = 1.06$). Respondents reported using passive religious deferral as a coping mechanism with the least frequency ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .901$).
Correlational Analysis

Pearson’s correlations for sample variables are shown in Tables F2 and F3. Table F2 presents data acquired from mean substitution, encompassing all 128 respondent answers. Table F3 displays responses based on missing data due to questions that went unanswered by respondents.

As illustrated in Table F2, correlation analysis for the mean imputed data \( N = 128 \) shows that GPA was negatively associated with public regard \( (r = -0.181, p = 0.021) \), passive religious deferral \( (r = -0.152, p = 0.043) \), and location \( (r = -0.214, p = 0.008) \). Age showed a near negative correlation with GPA \( (r = -0.144, p = 0.052) \). As illustrated in Table F3, analysis of responses with incomplete data \( (n = 73) \) underscores the correlations from the mean imputed results. GPA was negatively associated with public regard \( (r = -0.236, p = 0.022) \), age \( (r = -0.209 p = 0.038) \), and location \( (r = -0.250, p = 0.016) \). Distractive coping shows a near negative correlation with GPA \( (r = -188, p = 0.055) \).

Multiple Regression Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (2016). Data were obtained from the measures described in this study to examine the relationships among students’ GPA and social support, perceived racial discrimination, racial identity, coping, and religious coping. Included in the model were the demographic variables: mother’s education (a proxy for socioeconomic status), age, and location.
Research Question 1

What are the associations between academic achievement as measured by self-reported GPA and social support, racial discrimination, racial identity, coping, and religious coping strategies among African American male college students at two PWIs?

The full list-wise regression model analyzed the relationships among students’ GPA and the 12 independent variables that included respondents with all data reported ($n = 73$). Approximately 24% of the variation in GPA was explained by the predictive variables ($R^2 = .237$). However, Table F4 indicates that this model was not statistically significant, ($F (12, 60) = 1.550, p = 0.132$).

Thus, the decision was made to use a backward elimination regression approach to determine if one or a subset of the independent variables could be significantly associated with GPA. Backward elimination starts with all predictor variables in the model and at each step the model is refitted after the least significant variable, or the one with the highest $p$ value, is removed. Each subsequent step removes the least significant variable in the model until all remaining variables have individual $p$ values smaller than 0.05.

Following the backward regression analysis, four variables were shown to be statistically significant in relation to GPA, $F(4, 68) = 3.852, p = .007$ (Table F5). Combined, these four independent variables explained 18.5% ($R^2 = .185$) of the variation in GPA. In the reduced backward elimination model in which only four variables remained, when the independent variable passive religious deferral increased by one unit, the average GPA decreased by .15 ($b = -.150$). Similarly, when distractive coping increased by one unit the average GPA decreased by .56 ($b = -.563$). In addition, for every
year increase in respondents’ age, the average GPA decreased by .05 ($b = -.046$). Finally, the average GPA of students from the first university used in this study was on average .28 ($b = .282$) higher than the average GPA of students from the second university.

A comparison model, using mean substitution, was analyzed to determine if significant relationships existed among the independent variables and GPA. Mean substitution was used as a way of accounting for missing data in an acceptable way but still retaining sample size. Reporting results for the imputed model shows the similarities and differences from the non-imputed model. The imputed model included all 128 respondents ($N = 128$). Those variables with missing values were replaced with the mean to retain the full sample size for this model. In the full model, with all 12 independent variables entered, about 17% ($R^2 = .168$) of the variation in GPA was explained by the study variables. The full model (Table F6) indicates that overall the model that includes imputed data for participants was statistically significant $F(12, 115, = 1.918, p = 0.039)$.

To simplify this model, the decision was made to use the backward elimination approach to determine if one of the independent variables alone was significantly associated with GPA and responsible for the majority of the variance explained in the dependent variable. Following the backward deletion analysis, only two variables were shown to be significant in explaining the variance in GPA. Combined, these two variables, *passive religious deferral* and *location*, explained about 8% ($R^2 = .084$) of variation in GPA. In this reduced model, in which only these two independent variables remained, when *passive religious deferral* increased by one unit, the average GPA decreased by .11 ($b = -0.112$).
highly selective, public research institution was on average .25 ($b = .248$) higher than those from the public commuter institution.

**Research Question 2**

Does religious and distractive coping moderate the experience of discrimination and academic achievement among African American male college students who utilize coping mechanisms compared to those who do not?

In model 1, analysis of respondents with all data reported ($n = 83$), about 11% ($R^2 = .106$) of variation in GPA was explained by the coping variables, religious and distractive coping, and discrimination and their interaction. However, the ANOVA table, Table F7 indicates that this model was not significant, $F(7, 75) = 1.271, p = 0.276$). Further analysis using a backward deletion regression approach to determine if any of the independent variables were significant, indicated that none of the interactions were significant in explaining the variance in GPA. In this analysis, religious coping and discrimination interactions were removed from the model at step 3 and the discrimination and distractive coping interactions were removed at step 6, which indicates that neither interaction was statistically significant.

A similar analysis using mean substitution was also conducted. The results of this mean substitution analysis with the full sample ($N = 128$), when mean substitution was used, revealed similar outcomes. The interactions between racial discrimination and distractive coping variables, as well as racial discrimination and religious coping variables, were not statistically significant in explaining the variance in GPA in this sample.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Only recently has the phenomenon of college experiences as it relates to academic success for African American male college students been a focus of systematic research (Harper & Newman, 2016). Historically, research on African American male college students has centered on the hurdles and hardships to achievement that Black male students face rather than experiences that lead to success (Fordham, 1996). Limited attention has been given in higher education research to the relationship of social support, racial discrimination experiences, racial identity, and coping methods employed that help this group of students succeed.

There have been important previous investigations that have examined primarily the success of high-achieving African American male students at selective higher education institutions (Harper & Quay, 2007). Similarly to the Harper and Quay (2007) study, the present study incorporated an anti-deficit achievement approach advanced by Harper (2012) to examine academic outcomes for Black male college students by exploring the impact of specific coping mechanisms and adjustment experience on achievement. The goal was to highlight those aspects of college experience that positively affect the outcome of GPA. Thus, the present study did not simply seek to explore the experiences of Black male college students but through regression analyses investigate the associations between the Black male college student experience and its relationship to coping experiences and ultimately academic outcomes.

This dissertation study examined the relationship between achievement and experiences of social support, racial discrimination, racial identity, coping, and religious
The intent was to understand the association among the study variables and college success. Results indicate limited significance among study variables and their impact on GPA.

The second aim of this study was to explore the effect the interaction of religious and distractive coping and discrimination had on GPA. Findings suggest that there is no significant relationship between the coping interactions studied and GPA, although in one model a limited amount of variance in GPA was explained by the coping variables, religious and distractive coping, and discrimination and their interaction. Findings are discussed in further detail in this chapter along with implications for future study and similarities to and differences from related research.

**Research Question 1: Relationship of GPA to Study Variables**

The first research question asked whether there was an association between GPA and social support, experiences of racial discrimination, racial identity, coping, and religious coping. Findings were mixed regarding the relationship among college experiences and coping methods examined in this study as related to GPA for African American male college student respondents. In the primary model with mean substitution, GPA was significantly associated to social support, coping, religious coping, racial identity, and discrimination. The findings, however, indicate that together the variables had minimal impact on GPA. In contrast, in a reduced model where only respondents who answered all survey questions were included, no significant relationship was found among the combined study variables and GPA. Another analysis—where study variables were removed at each step from the model based on significance—revealed that passive religious deferral and distractive coping were significant, albeit negatively, in
determining GPA. The study examined the cumulative GPA of students of which 51.5 percent were juniors and seniors and 42.2 percent were freshmen; 2.3 percent were fifth-year seniors. Since results were presented in aggregate, it is likely that nuances in year-to-year academic achievement may have been lost. For instance, results of an analyses solely comparing GPAs of new transitioning freshmen and graduating seniors could present different results. In addition, while results of the current study show declining GPAs with age, prior student development theory (Chickering, 1969) indicates with maturity and self-confidence students generally perform better as they gain greater stability over time, traits more common among upper class students than freshmen.

Contrary to the study hypothesis and previous literature on the reliance on religious coping to deal with life’s stressors by African American men (Herndon, 2003; Thornton, 2004; Riggins, et al., 2008), passive religious deferral was associated with decreased GPA in this sample. For this group, turning things over to God had a negative effect on GPA, contrary to the literature. The finding also conflicts with Pargament (1997) whose assertion that religious coping methods mediate the relationships between an individual’s general religious orientation and the outcomes of major life events was not supported here. Perhaps for this sample of African American men negotiating college life, a passive approach may be counterproductive. Additionally, no significant relationship was found between active collaborative religious coping and other coping strategies that might be useful in solving problems.

Further, a majority of participants in this study did not seek assistance from resident assistants, or look for help from a psychologist or counselor to deal with stressful situations. This finding is consistent with previous literature that found African American
males are not likely to seek clinical help for coping with stress or distress (Lee, 1997). The results, however, support Tinto’s (1975) integration theory in that some of the male college students in this sample indicated they sought help from other on-campus resources, including roommates and professors. Based on Tinto (1975), utilization of resources such as roommates and professors is conceptualized as a critical aspect of connecting to the college environment and is related to positive achievement outcomes. Immersing in the college environment and seeking support from those in the new environment while shedding old ties is a major tenet of Tinto’s (1975) theory of social and academic integration.

In this study, there was limited evidence to support relationships between the study variables and GPA. It is possible, therefore, that other variables shown to improve GPA like self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) and precollege experience (Tinto, 1975) should have been included in the current model to better understand variance in academic outcomes.

**Research Question 2: Discrimination, Distractive Coping, and GPA**

The second research question asked if religious and distractive coping moderate the experience of racial discrimination and academic achievement among African American male college students who utilize coping mechanisms compared to those who do not. In the study analyses, the interaction between religious and distractive coping and discrimination was not shown to be significant to GPA outcome.

Again, contrary to the hypothesis, and to previous research on distractive coping as a style that is protective for males (Sheu & Sedlacek 2004; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991), distractive coping in this study was associated with decreased GPA in this sample. One
explanation could be that distracting from problems in a context where African American men may be feeling marginalized (Fleming, 1984), could result in less focus on academic studies and hence experience lower achievement. This somewhat surprising finding for distractive coping could also be explained by the fact that the study did not measure all forms of positive coping. One reason distractive coping (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991) may have been negatively related to the outcome in this study could be that the original conceptualization of this style of coping by Nolen-Hoeksema (1991) does not necessarily consider differences in coping styles by race. Previous literature indicates race and ethnicity play a role in how students cope (Chiang, Hunter, & Yeh, 2004).

Previous research indicates that discrimination has a negative effect on Black students’ GPA (Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire, & Green, 2004), although findings in the current study did not lend evidence to this relationship. In this study, the findings converge with other previous studies indicating that racism and discrimination are not actually significant indicators of student outcomes (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987). The findings for this study, however, support prior research that discrimination is a customary part of college life for African American students (Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007; Sellers et al., 2003). For instance, participants reported regular experiences of discrimination with a quarter of the respondents experiencing all 18 of the discriminatory events on the MIBI (Sellers et al., 2003) in the previous year. The present findings also corroborate previous research that shows African American men face adjustment challenges beyond those typically experienced by college students, and that they face discrimination more than other groups
(Suarez-Balcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan, & Andrews-Guillen, 2003); (Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003). Results from this study suggest that even though respondents reported a positive sense of self as a Black person (centrality) and positive feelings about their racial group (private regard), the majority reported that others’ hold negative beliefs about Blacks (public regard). These findings conflict with previous literature that shows higher levels of centrality, private regard, and public regard can lead to higher academic outcomes (Chavous et al., 1997). It is conceivable that the men in this study felt good about themselves and their race, but in the environment of a PWI where they often feel isolated (Fleming, 1984), their experiences and lack of representation led them to believe others held them and their group in low regard.

African American males at PWIs have since experienced a different, and possibly more strained, campus environment evident by the social justice movement that emerged following the shooting deaths of black men by police across the country. Therefore, in this most recent campus climate where incidences of racial discrimination are being brought to the forefront, it is likely that the results of the current study would have drawn different conclusions had the sample group been gathered today. Specifically, African American males who have experienced the public shooting deaths of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown, are living in a campus environment where the Black Lives Matters movement is prevalent and activism is heightened. At the same time, African American male college students are constructing their own identities and defining themselves.
Certainly, survey questions regarding perceived racial discrimination and racial identity may be viewed differently by African American males attending a PWI whose perceptions are currently shaped through a climate of activism spurred by discrimination and racism. For example: Ongoing student protests forced the president of the University of Missouri System to resign in 2015. Student demonstrations led administrators at Georgetown University to rename two buildings that had formerly been named after presidents who owned slaves. In addition, coping mechanisms that affect achievement may also vary in a more volatile campus environment, where greater black student activism has sought changes within higher education institutions from everything from larger black student enrollment to the hiring of more black faculty to greater sensitivity and designated spaces where African American students can go to nurture culture and friendships, away from the often isolating predominantly white academic settings. In fact, research suggests that supportive relationships within the African American male subculture can alleviate stressors from campus racism and isolation faced by African American males at PWIs (Cuyjet, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008). It is clear, then, had the data collected for this study been gathered in 2016, student reaction to both racial identity and discrimination survey questions would likely be more reflective of the current, strained campus climate and the black male student experience, both on campus and in the broader society.

**Implications**

This exploration of coping mechanisms as a potentially overlooked anti-deficit construct that can improve our understanding of academic achievement African American males attending PWIs, and therefore contribute to the research on achievement
for the nation’s most vulnerable group of college students. College administrators may want to think about engaging Black men to be active with dealing with issues that they face, from discrimination, to life stressors, to help them feel more power over their situation. Academic achievement might be addressed by creating mechanisms for greater contact with professors and study groups which may improve the environment as inclusive and supportive of Black men. This could increase Black male students’ perceptions of how they are viewed by others (public regard). Further exploration of the intersection between religious coping and racial identity, and their combined impact on academic outcomes would offer insights for higher education leaders searching for ways to assist African American male college students in their college and academic adjustment. In terms of supporting this group who are generally known to have strong religious ties, programming could be offered to ease the transition and create an environment that promotes the incorporation of religious beliefs.

**Limitations and Future Research**

This study sought to provide insight into factors that have an impact on the path to college success for African American male college students. The study was not without some limitations. First, since this study design was a quantitative examination of the relationship between the study variables and achievement as measured by GPA, respondents were limited to only choosing answers from the items in the measures included in the data collection. It is possible that qualitative interviews, observations, and document analysis could be used to elucidate additional factors that influence achievement among African American male students.
Second, generalizations of the results are limited because the study used a sample from only two Midwestern universities. The sample may not be representative of the experiences of other African American male students at other predominantly White institutions or at institutions of various types, including community colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Future research should therefore examine African American male college students’ achievement at various types of higher education institutions in different regions to gain a broader perspective of the experiences of Black male college students and the variables that affect their college outcomes.

Third, demographic information (age, mother’s education, GPA) was obtained by self-report. Therefore, the information may not be accurate as some respondents may have miscalculated or inflated grades or provided information inaccurate or incomplete information about their family. In addition, because of the use of secondary data, which did not capture the family support construct, there was limitations in measuring the support received from family members for the sample group, which could have provided insight into coping for the African American male sample group. Finally, generalizations of the findings of this study are limited because of the nature of conducting a cross-sectional examination with secondary data.

**Conclusion**

Racial discrimination continues to be a prevalent experience for African American male college students. Results indicate that coping mechanisms used by African American male students to moderate college experiences, including discrimination, do not necessarily result in increased positive academic outcomes. As demonstrated by the present study, in the instances where religious coping and racial
identity regard were found to be significant, GPA was affected negatively, albeit by a small margin. For the emerging African American male college student, social support, racial discrimination, racial identity, coping, and religious coping were shown to work together to a limited degree. This study adds to the more recent body of research that seeks to provide greater understanding of the experiences of African American male college students and their academic achievement from an anti-deficit approach by exploring relationships among coping experiences and academic outcomes.

Results from the present study contribute to higher education research in understanding African American male experiences and outcomes through the influences of coping mechanisms on academic achievement. As suggested by the findings, social support, racial discrimination, racial identity, coping, and religious coping are among representative variables that make up the complexity of experiences of African American male college students although it did not explicitly demonstrate impact on academic outcome.
References


APPENDIX A

Racial Discrimination Scale

Daily Life Events Scale

(Harrell, 1997)

These questions ask you to think about experiences that some people have as they go about their daily lives. Please first determine how often you have experienced each event because of your race or racism in the past year. Use the scale in the first column and circle the appropriate number in the first column. Next, use the scale in the second column to indicate how much it bothers you when the experience happens. Circle the appropriate number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often because of race?</th>
<th>How much does it bother you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 = never</td>
<td>0 = has never happened to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 = once or twice</td>
<td>1 = doesn’t bother me at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 = a few times</td>
<td>2 = bothers me a little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 = about once a month</td>
<td>3 = bothers me somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 = a few times a month</td>
<td>4 = bothers me a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 = once a week or more</td>
<td>5 = bothers me extremely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>How often because of race?</th>
<th>How much does it bother you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Being ignored, overlooked, or not given service (in a</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restaurant, store, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Being treated rudely or disrespectfully</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Being accused of something or treated suspiciously</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Others reacting to you as if they were afraid or</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intimidated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Being observed or followed in public places</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Being treated as if you were “stupid,” being “talked down</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Your ideas or opinions being minimized, ignored or</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>devalued</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Overhearing or being told an offensive joke or comment</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Being insulted, called a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>name, or harassed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Others expecting your</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work to be inferior</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Not being taken seriously</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Being left out of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conversations or activities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Being treated in an &quot;overly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friendly or superficial way</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Other people avoiding you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Being mistaken for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>someone who serves others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i.e. janitor, bellboy, maid.)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Being stared at by</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strangers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Being laughed at, made</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fun of, or taunted</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Being mistaken for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>someone else of your same</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>race</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX B

### Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity- Short Form

*(Sellers et al., 1997)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is important for Black people to surround their children with Black art, music and literature.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel good about Black people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, Blacks are considered good by others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, being Black is an important part of my self-image.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am happy that I am Black.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks would be better off if they adopted Afrocentric values.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black people must organize themselves into a separate Black political force.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, others respect Black people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a strong sense of belonging to Black people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The same forces which have led to the oppression of Blacks have also led to the oppression of other groups.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White people can never be trusted where Blacks are concerned.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks should have the choice to marry interracially.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks would be better off if they were more concerned with the problems facing all people than just focusing on Black issues.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being an individual is more important than identifying oneself as Black.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Blacks should judge Whites as individuals and not as members of the White race.  
I have a strong attachment to other Black people.  
The struggle for Black liberation in America Should be closely related to the struggle of other oppressed groups.
Blacks should strive to be full members of the American political system.  
Blacks should try to work within the system to achieve their political and economic goals.  
Blacks should strive to integrate all institutions which are segregated.  
The racism Blacks have experienced is similar to That of other minority groups.  
Blacks should feel free to interact socially with White people.  
There are other people who experience racial injustice and indignities similar to Black Americans.  
Being Black is an important reflection of who I am.  
In general, other groups view Blacks in a positive manner.  
I am proud to be Black.  
Society views Black people as an asset.
APPENDIX C

Religious Coping Scale

(Pargament et al., 1988)

For the following items please focus on a recent stressful life event. It can be the negative event you just described or another stressful situation that recently occurred (Circle One):

Event described above  Another recent stressful life event
(briefly describe): __________________________________________

In addition to the items above, there are other ways to try and deal with problems/feelings. These items also ask about what you did to cope with this negative event. Obviously, different people deal with things in different ways, but we are interested in how you tried to cope. Each item says something about a particular way of coping; we want to know to what extent you did what the item says. How much or how frequently? Don’t answer on the basis of what worked — just whether or not you did it. Try to rate each item separately in your mind from others. Make your answers as true FOR YOU as you can. Circle the answer that best applies to you.

1. Did my best then turned the situation over to God (or Higher Power).
   1 – A great deal
   2 – Quite a bit
   3 – Somewhat
   4 – Not at all

2. Did what I could and put the rest in God’s (or Higher Power’s) hands.
   1 – A great deal
   2 – Quite a bit
   3 – Somewhat
   4 – Not at all

3. Took control over what I could, and gave the rest up to God (or Higher Power).
   1 – A great deal
   2 – Quite a bit
   3 – Somewhat
   4 – Not at all

4. Didn’t do much, just expected God (Higher Power) to solve my problems for me.
5. Didn’t try much of anything, simply expected God (or Higher Power) to take control.
   1 – A great deal
   2 – Quite a bit
   3 – Somewhat
   4 – Not at all

6. Didn’t try to cope, only expected God to take my worries away.
   1 – A great deal
   2 – Quite a bit
   3 – Somewhat
   4 – Not at all

7. Tried to deal with my feelings without God’s (or Higher Power’s) help.
   1 – A great deal
   2 – Quite a bit
   3 – Somewhat
   4 – Not at all

8. Tried to make sense of the situation without relying on God (or Higher Power).
   1 – A great deal
   2 – Quite a bit
   3 – Somewhat
   5 – Not at all

9. Made decisions about what to do without God’s (or Higher Power’s) help.
   1 – A great deal
   2 – Quite a bit
   3 – Somewhat
   4 – Not at all
APPENDIX D

Coping Scale

(Nolen-Hoeksema, Morrow, & Fredrickson, 1993)

Please think back to the most recent time you felt down, depressed, hopeless, extremely frustrated or otherwise significantly upset. Try to remember what was happening, the cause of your negative mood, and what you did when you were feeling bad. In the space below, please briefly describe the event or situation, when it occurred, how you felt, and then answer the following questions with regard to the situation you have described. We are interested in knowing how you coped with your bad feelings, so please indicate how often you did something in response to your mood during the time you have described.

Briefly describe event or situation:

When did this occur (date):

Briefly described how you felt (feelings experienced):

How long did the feelings of sadness or depression last (circle one number)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>few</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>few</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>of</td>
<td>the day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Or if longer than a full day please describe:

In general, how sad or depressed did you feel (circle one number):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Just a little sad/depressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Extremely sad/depressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How did you respond to this mood?** Place an “X” next to any of the descriptions below that match closely what you thought about or how you behaved in response to this mood. Check as many thoughts and/or behaviors as apply.

Thoughts:
1. ___ I’ve got to get up and do something to make myself feel better.
2. ___ Why do I always react this way?
3. ___ There must be something wrong with me or I wouldn’t feel this way.
4. ___ Why can’t I handle things better?
5. ___ I’ve got things under control.
6. ___ No one will want to be around me if I don’t snap out of this mood.
7. ___ These feelings won’t last.
8. ___ Why can’t I be satisfied with the way things are?
9. ___ I think I must really have serious problems, otherwise I wouldn’t feel this way.
10. ___ I need to understand these feelings.
11. ___ I won’t think about how I feel, I’ll just concentrate on what I have to do.
12. ___ I’m only going to think about good things.
13. ___ Why can’t I get going?
14. ___ Why do I have problems that other people don’t seem to have?
15. ___ I will get my mind on something else other than the way I feel.
16. ___ Try to ignore the situation/feelings.
16. ___ I’m not going to think about how I feel.
17. ___ I won’t be able to concentrate if I keep feeling this way.
B23. ___ Really don’t care about it too much.
18. ___ I’ve got to have some fun.

Behaviors:
1. ___ Go to my favorite hangout to get my mind off my feelings.
20. ___ Let the situation/bad feelings “roll off my back.”
15. ___ Try to feel better/reduce stress by partying/going out.
19. ___ Use humor to lighten up.
2. ___ Go to sleep to escape how I feel.
3. ___ Go to my room alone to think about my feelings.
18. ___ Try to feel better/reduce stress by taking drugs.
4. ___ Do something fun with a friend.
5. ___ Do something active to get my mind off my feelings (i.e. jog/aerobics/tennis).
6. ___ Daydream, fantasize or think about good things.
7. ___ Sit at home and think about how I feel.
8. ___ Listen to sad music.
9. ___ Read something entertaining (i.e., magazine/book) to get my attention away from my mood.
10. ___ Do something I enjoy.
17. ___ Try to feel better/reduce stress by drinking more.
11. ___ Isolate myself and think about the reasons I’m feeling this way.
12. ___ Write about my feelings (i.e., journal/diary/letter).
13. ___ Talk to others about how I’m feeling
14. ___ Watch T.V. to forget about how I feel.

16. ___ Try to feel better/reduce stress by smoking more.

24. ___ Won’t let it get to me.
APPENDIX E

Social Support Scale (Adapted)

(Banks, Kohn-Wood & Spencer, 2006)

*How much do you rely on the following people for support? Please circle appropriate number.*

0=none  1=rarely  2=a little  3=sometimes  4=often  5=always  9=not applicable

1. A roommate
2. A professor/GSI
3. Resident Assistant
4. Counselor/Therapist
### APPENDIX F

**TABLES**

#### Table F1

Demographic Characteristics of Sample \((N = 128)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age of Participants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
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*Note.* *Missing data from 5 participants*
### Table F2

**Bivariate Correlations Between GPA and All Predicted Variables (N=128)**

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*Note.* *p*<.05. **p*<.01. ***p*<.001.
Table F3

*Bivariate Correlations Between GPA and All Predicted Variables (N=73)*

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*Note.* *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.
Table F4

Multiple Linear Regression Model Results: Characteristics Predicting GPAs of African American Male College Students at Two Predominantly White Institutions (n=73)

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Note: Reduced sample due to missing values.

*p< .05
Table F5

*Backward Deletion Regression Results: Characteristics Predicting GPAs of African American Male College Students at Two Predominantly White Institutions (n=73)*

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Note: *All variables remaining in model
*p < .05
Table F6

Multiple Linear Regression Model Results: Characteristics Predicting GPAs of African American Male College Students at Two Predominantly White Institutions (n=128)

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Note: This sample includes all 128 subjects by mean substitution of missing values.
*p< .05
Table F7

*Backward Deletion Regression Results: Characteristics Predicting GPAs of African American Male College Students at Two Predominately White Institutions (n = 128)*

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Note: *All variables remaining in the model
*p<0.05
APPENDIX G

FIGURES

Figure G1

Tinto’s (1975) Integration Model

Figure G2

Power Analysis

F tests – Linear multiple regression: Fixed model, $R^2$ deviation from zero
Number of predictors = 12, $\alpha$ err prob = 0.05, Effect size $f^2 = 0.333333$
Figure G3

Study Model

Demographic Variables:
- Age
- SES
- Campus Location

Independent Variables:
- Social Support
- Discrimination
- Racial Identity
- Coping
- Religious Coping

Dependent Variable

Outcome:
- Self-Reported GPA
- Discrimination x Distractive Coping
- Discrimination x Religious Coping