

# Predictors of Faculty–Student Engagement for Black Men in Urban Community Colleges: An Investigation of the Community College Survey of Men

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## Abstract

This research focuses on factors predicting faculty–student engagement for Black male collegians. In this study, the authors investigated whether students’ perceptions of racial/gender stereotypes had a moderating effect on the determinants of engagement with faculty. The sample population was derived from 16 urban community colleges located across four states. A total of 340 Black men participated in the Community College Survey of Men. Degree utility and intrinsic interest were both found to be positive determinants of faculty–student engagement. The variable with the most significant contribution to the model was faculty validation.

## Keywords

Black males, faculty relationships, urban, social, minority academic success, urban education, African American students

In February of 2014, President Barack Obama announced the creation of the My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) initiative. The MBK initiative, supported by

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funding and partnerships from private organizations and foundations, was established to “address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color [to] ensure that all young people can reach their full potential” (White House, 2014, para. 1). MBK was designed to promulgate evidenced-based, promising practices for enhancing the success of boys and men of color in education, the criminal justice system, and in the workforce (The Seven Centers Report, 2014). While attentive to all of these intervention domains, the initiative has prioritized education as the primary sector for addressing the life opportunities of young men of color. Specifically, four of the six MBK initiative milestones focus explicitly on the realities and opportunities facing underrepresented males of color in education. MBK interventions are focused in school readiness for early childhood education, grade-level reading proficiency, graduation from high school, college-going, and completion of postsecondary education and training.

The latter focus on postsecondary education is in alignment with an ever-growing body of research and programmatic interventions focused on men of color (particularly for Black men). As noted by Harper (2010), the attention given to Black males in education has been expansive in recent years. Numerous policy reports, centers, programs and initiatives, conferences, seminars, and news stories have focused on the deleterious outcomes experienced by these men. The focus of Black men is also heightened by the recent, high-profile killings of Michael Brown, Oscar Grant III, Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, and others (Harper & Wood, 2015). Coupled with the interest on Black men, an expansive body of research on these men has proliferated (Bonner, 2010, 2014; Cuyjet, 2006; Dancy, 2012; Davis, 1994; Harper, 2010, 2012, 2014; Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003; Palmer & Dubord, 2013; Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014).

Interestingly, while researchers have rigorously addressed the educational realities of Black men in postsecondary education, historically, the majority of this scholarship has focused on men who are enrolled in public 4-year colleges and universities (for critiques, see Harris & Wood, 2013; Wood & Palmer, 2014). As a result, the predominant theories, models, and assumptions regarding Black men were developed based on those enrolled in 4-year institutions. Juxtaposed to this research are enrollment rates for Black men which demonstrate that their primary residence in public postsecondary education is in community colleges (Wood, 2013). For example, 63.2% of Black men are enrolled in public 2-year colleges while only 36.5% are enrolled in 4-year institutions<sup>1</sup> (National Postsecondary Student Aid Study [NPSAS], 2012a). Cognizant of this fact, scholarship on Black men in community colleges has grown in the past decade (Bush & Bush, 2010; Bush, Bush, & Wilcoxson, 2009; Flowers, 2006; Freeman & Huggans, 2009; Glenn, 2003-2004; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001; Harper, 2009; Harris & Wood,

2013; Mason, 1998; Wood & Williams, 2013). This research, though dwarfed by that of scholarship on Black men in 4-year institutions, has illuminated the unique experiential realities of Black community college men. This body of scholarship represents a necessary contribution to the literature given that Black men in community colleges (in comparison to their 4-year counterparts) are more likely to be older, married, have dependents, attend college part-time, and delay their enrollment into postsecondary education (Wood, 2013). Therefore, these men's experiences are likely different than a traditional age (i.e., 18-22 year old) Black male entering a 4-year university as a first time freshman. Black men attending community colleges will possibly have different interactions with their campus environment, which includes but is not limited to interactions with faculty members, peers, staff, and administrators. The following section places into context the importance of focusing on success outcomes and how the present study will add to our understanding of Black men in community colleges.

## **Study Purpose**

A comprehensive investigation into the experiences, perceptions, and outcomes of Black men in postsecondary education must acknowledge the distinctiveness and importance of the community college context. Bearing this in mind, this article reports on an investigation into one key factor influencing student success outcomes (e.g., persistence, achievement, attainment, transfer) for Black men in the community college. In particular, this research focuses on factors that are predictive of faculty–student engagement for Black men attending urban community colleges. This study also investigated whether students' perceptions of racial/gender stereotypes had a moderating effect on the determinants of engagement with faculty. While research on men of color in community colleges and the importance of faculty–student engagement will be addressed in the following section, it is important first to contextualize the rationale for this article's specific focus on urban community colleges.

The federal government classifies urban-centric colleges and universities based on a methodology that takes into account the location of the institution in proximity to the closest principal urban center and total population of the area. The government employs four classification levels, including urban/city, suburban, town, and rural with three categories within each classification. For example, urban centers are divided into three categories, small, mid-size, and large. Correspondingly, these categories are associated with populations inside principal cities of less than 100,000, 100,000 to 250,000, and 250,000 or more (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS], 2012). Moreover, of the 974 public 2-year colleges in the nation, roughly 30% ( $n = 291$ ) are located in urban areas. Populations of men of

color are concentrated in these areas, especially given that nearly 70% of urban colleges are part of multi-campus districts (IPEDS, 2012).

Based on this definition, a high proportion, 51.1%, of Black men attending community colleges are enrolled in urban institutions. Correspondingly, the percentage breakdown by small, midsize, and large urban colleges is 9.6%, 11.6%, and 29.9%, respectively. It should be noted that a large contingent of Black men are also enrolled in large suburban institutions, at 26.8%. Although not classified as urban, large suburban colleges are near urban centers and have local populations of 250,000 or more. Thus, *some* large suburban colleges closely mirror that of their urban counterparts, with the defining line between large suburban and urban colleges sometimes being more technical than actual. That being said, this study focused only on colleges that met the IPEDS definition of an urban community college. Beyond these percentages, the remaining populations of Black men are dispersed throughout differing institutional types, with the most noticeable percentage being enrolled in rural-fringe community colleges (at 11.7%; NPSAS, 2012b). Urbanicity classifications are essential for understanding the outcomes of Black men in college as differential student success rates are evident. Three year completion rates provide insight into outcome inequities. For example, within a 3-year time frame, 25.6% and 22.8% of Black men in suburban and rural/town<sup>2</sup> colleges will earn a certificate, degree, or transfer to a 4-year college or university. In contrast, only 13.0% of Black men attending urban colleges will complete their goals in the same time frame (Beginning Postsecondary Students [BPS], 2009a).

In sum, any research responding to the current national focus on Black male college-going and completion should be cognizant of two critical points. First, the majority of Black men who are enrolled in public postsecondary education attend community colleges, not 4-year institutions. As such, community colleges shape the predominant experiences, perceptions, and outcomes of Black men in college. Second, most Black men who attend community colleges are enrolled in urban institutions. Unfortunately, urban community colleges foster significantly lower completion rates for Black men than do their suburban and rural/town institutional counterparts. The following section delves into pertinent studies that helps paint a broader portrait of the experiences of Black men in postsecondary institutions and highlight the current gaps in the research literature.

## Relevant Literature

Prior scholarship has demonstrated that faculty–student engagement (also referred to as faculty–student interactions) is an integral component to student success for community college students. Specifically, scholars have shown that

faculty–student engagement is predictive of positive non-cognitive outcomes, such as enhanced motivation, academic self-concept, satisfaction with their academic experiences, and elevated focus on academic matters (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; McClenney, 2004). Moreover, faculty–student engagement has also been shown to be a significant determinant of increased academic performance, student retention, and goal completion (Bush & Bush, 2010; Cejda & Hoover, 2010; Chang, 2005; Cole, 2008, 2010; Cole & Griffin, 2013; Newman, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Price & Tovar, 2014; Thompson, 2001; Wood, 2012a, 2012b). Possibly, enhanced student success outcomes derived from faculty–student engagement are a function of improved student learning. For instance, Lundberg (2014) employed data from the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire to demonstrate that increased faculty–student engagement results in greater learning in general education, science, and technology as well as improved intellectual, personal, and career development. Moreover, in a prior study, Lundberg and Schreiner (2004) illustrated that the learning derived from engagement with faculty may differ across ethnic group. Specifically, they found that students of color reap an intensified benefit for learning as a result of engagement with faculty than do their White counterparts.

Unfortunately, many Black men do not benefit from engagement with faculty (Harper, 2009). Data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students' (BPS) longitudinal study help to demonstrate this point. According to BPS (2009b), 66.9% of Black men “never” had an informal meeting with a faculty member during their first year of college. In contrast, 27.4% of Black men noted that they had met with faculty “sometimes,” whereas only 5.7% said that they did so “often.” Overwhelmingly, these data show that Black men have limited informal interactions with faculty. However, in line with research on other community college students, Black men who had interactions with faculty were significantly more likely to persist, achieve, complete their goals, and transfer (Bush & Bush, 2010; Flowers, 2006; Wood & Turner, 2011). For instance, as demonstrated by Wood (2012b), Black men who either had informal interactions with faculty “sometimes” or “often” had greater odds of persistence and attainment, by 283%, than those who did so “never.” Of course, there are many types of interactions that can occur, including those that take place in-class and out-of-class as well as those that are relevant to academic matters and non-academic matters.

However, Black men are more likely than their peers to be in need of the various forms of interactions with faculty and campus support services. Yet, Black men are least likely to have such experiences with faculty members or receive the necessary support from the institution (Bush & Bush, 2010). Both Harper (2009) and Bush and Bush (2010) situate the onus of responsibility for limited engagement on community colleges as opposed to students. They

noted that Black men experience more limited levels of engagement due to institutional climates and cultures that are typified by racism, stereotypes, and lack of commitment to Black male success. This notion led the authors to hypothesize that campus ethos factors would have the strongest effect on faculty–student engagement in comparison with other factors in the models. It also served as the impetus for the investigation of students’ perceptions of stereotypes as a potential moderator for their engagement with faculty. The importance of the focus on perceived stereotypes is heightened by research from Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, Martin, and Castro (2010) who found that men of color “routinely experienced stereotypical attitudes that linked them to thuggery and violence, among many other negative associations” as their “very existence made them suspect in the eyes of some,” particularly faculty members (p. 21). As a result of such perceptions, Wood (2014) used interviews with Black men to show that they are apprehensive to engage with faculty in the classroom for fear of being perceived as “dumb,” “ignorant,” and “stupid” by faculty. Responding to these notions, Wood and Turner (2011) articulated key practices that faculty can employ to facilitate positive engagement with Black men. These practices included (a) being friendly with Black men at the onset, (b) checking in on students’ academic progress, (c) listening to concerns raised by students, (d) proactively monitoring student performance, and (e) providing students with encouragement to succeed. These conditions certainly provide a framework for positive interactions with faculty and students. The next section explores the extant research on determinants of faculty–student engagement in the community college.

### *Determinants of Faculty–Student Engagement*

Interestingly, although a large number of studies have examined the benefits of faculty–student engagement (Bush & Bush, 2010; Cejda & Hoover, 2010; Chang, 2005; Cole, 2008, 2010; Cole & Griffin, 2013; Komarraju et al., 2010; McClenney, 2004; Newman, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Price & Tovar, 2014; Thompson, 2001; Wood, 2012a, 2012b), fewer studies have been attentive to determinants of this engagement (Wood & Ireland, 2014). Some scholars have set out to explore student characteristics that influence their likelihood for engagement with faculty. For instance, Chang (2005) noted that students who are older and have parents with higher levels of education are more likely to engage with faculty. The role of parent’s education in faculty–student engagement was also examined by Rendón and Valdez (1993). They conducted interviews with Hispanic students at six southwestern community colleges to examine student transfer. They also interviewed administrators and faculty at these same institutions. Their findings indicated

that students' cultural capital was an integral factor influencing student interactions with faculty (e.g., asking questions in class, meeting with faculty during office hours), which in turn influenced transfer. More specifically, they noted that students whose families had more limited knowledge of college and college-level expectations engaged less frequently with faculty.

While investigations into background characteristics have yielded some insights, many scholars have focused on the role of environmental pressures on faculty–student engagement. Environmental pressures are factors that occur outside of college that affect students' success inside of college (Harris & Wood, 2013). One clear example of this research is a study conducted by Cotton and Wilson (2006). Using data derived from focus groups with 49 participants, they reported that being enrolled part-time, working, commuting to college, and having familial responsibilities were all negatively attributed to faculty–student engagement. However, in a study conducted by Thompson (2001), mixed findings were produced on the effect of environmental pressures on faculty–student engagement among community college students. Thompson hypothesized that environmental pressures (e.g., having a job, hours worked, and familial responsibilities) would have a negative effect on faculty–student engagement. However, while time spent working were determined to have a negative effect on faculty–student engagement, familial responsibilities had a positive effect. In essence, commitment to supporting and caring for family members facilitated students' engagement as opposed to inhibiting it.

Though Cotton and Wilson's (2006) study contributed to an enhanced understanding of the role of environmental pressures on faculty–student engagement, arguably, the other findings from their study were more salient for improving practice. They found that students did not believe that faculty members wanted to have greater levels of engagement with them. As a result, students noted that they engaged with faculty when they felt that faculty were open to such relationships. Their research also pointed to structural factors such as class sizes and campus planning as influencers of engagement. For instance, they found that larger courses limited opportunities for students to engage with faculty. They also noted that students were less likely to engage with their faculty when their offices are located in less accessible locations on campus. Possibly, their findings demonstrate that convenience is a key factor influencing faculty–student engagement. This may be one rationale for explaining why community college students who participate in learning communities benefit from greater levels of faculty–student engagement than those who do not (Barbatis, 2010). While, the studies above shed light on the importance of faculty–student engagement, the following section focuses specifically on Black men to better understand more specific factors that impact success for this population.

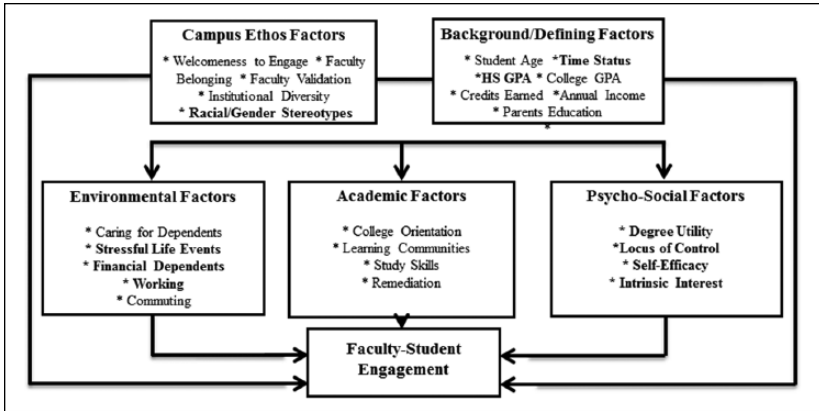
### *Faculty–Student Engagement Predictors for Black Men*

Guided by the aforementioned works, Wood and Ireland (2014) extended scholars understanding of faculty–student engagement determinants for Black men. They used data from more than 11,000 Black men nested within 260 community colleges from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). Using multi-level, hierarchical linear regression analyses, they pinpointed key determinants of faculty–student engagement for these men. Across models, several positive determinants of faculty–student engagement were identified, including credits, college GPA, providing care for dependents, and time spent commuting to campus. Obviously, the latter of these findings diverge from results produced by Cotton and Wilson (2006). However, the most salient contribution of this study to extant research was Wood and Ireland’s (2014) focus on academic interventions and services. Specifically, they found that Black men who participated in reading remediation, learning communities, study skills courses, and orientation were significantly more likely to be engaged with faculty. Moreover, in previous models (prior to the introduction of the above academic interventions), results indicated that institutional climates where students felt a sense of belonging and had greater exposure to diverse interactions with peers were also more likely to foster engagement with faculty.

Subsequently, a study conducted by Harrison and Palacios (2014) provided additional insight into the salience of campus ethos factors. They employed data from the Community College Survey of Men (CCSM) to examine whether levels of faculty–student engagement differed by campus ethos factors. Their research divided students’ perceptions of whether they were welcome to engage with faculty inside of class and outside of class, and perceptions of belonging with faculty into quartiles. Using analysis of covariance, they determined that men in the third and fourth quartiles for the campus ethos factors had greater levels of faculty–student engagement than their peers in the first and second quartiles. A complementary study by Bauer (2014) also provides insight into campus ethos factors. Bauer examined three different types of validation messages from faculty to students by time status (e.g., part-time, full-time) on engagement with faculty. While she did not find time status to result in differential scores for faculty–student engagement, she did determine that greater levels of validation from faculty were associated with higher engagement scores.

Collectively, the studies conducted by Wood and Ireland (2014), Harrison and Palacios (2014), and Bauer (2014) served as the conceptual framework for this research. Figure 1 provides a theoretical model based on previous findings with additional areas for exploration identified in bold. The model aggregates findings from prior research into five key domains, including





**Figure 1.** Theoretical model of faculty–student engagement for Black men in urban community colleges.

campus ethos, background/defining, environmental, academic, and psycho-social. While there are variables identified for exploration in this study across the domains, the majority of variables for exploration in this current research study are concentrated in the psychosocial domain. These variables are comprised of non-cognitive factors (e.g., degree utility, locus of control, self-efficacy, intrinsic interest). The psychosocial domain represents the most salient potential contribution to the literature on Black men in community colleges. Of the three prior studies of faculty–student engagement for Black men, psychosocial factors were not examined. An examination that includes psychosocial factors is important because researchers will be able to more precisely attribute the factors leading to success by controlling for institutional experiences and student’s intrinsic motivation. An investigation that omits psychosocial factors may erroneously blame students and not the institution for inequitable outcomes. This particular study will examine only four domains, as academic factors were not readily available in the data source used. The next section overviews the methods employed in this study.

## Methods

Data from this study were derived from community colleges participating in the CCSM. The CCSM is employed by colleges around the nation to investigate factors that influence student success. To date, more than 45 community colleges in eight states have used the CCSM with more than 7,000 men (Wood, Harris, & Xiong, 2014). In particular, the instrument focuses on men from

historically underrepresented and underserved backgrounds with an emphasis on men of color, particularly Black, Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Southeast Asian men. Primarily, the CCSM is an institutional-level needs assessment tool, though the instrument is also employed by colleges for benchmarking, performance monitoring, and program-level assessment (Wood & Harris, 2013). The population sample employed in the study was derived from 16 urban community colleges located in the states of Arizona, California, Illinois, and Maryland. Of these colleges, 14 were classified by the federal government as large city/urban while one college was midsize urban and the other small urban. From these institutions, a total of 340 urban Black men participated in the CCSM. The survey was distributed via a random online distribution using 116 items situated in 30 questioning blocks.

## Measures

This research utilized non-nested, hierarchical linear regression to investigate predictors of faculty–student engagement. Hierarchical linear regression allows researchers to incrementally enter variables into the model, based on a theoretical lens, to account for changes in the explained variance ( $R^2$  and significant predictors). *Faculty–student engagement* assessed the degree to which students had interactions with faculty about academic and non-academic matters, in-class and out-of-class. Faculty–student engagement represented a composite variable, derived from students’ level of agreement with four statements. Each of the four statements were collected on a 6-point frequency scale as follows: “never,” “once a semester,” “once a month,” “a few times a month,” “weekly,” and “several times a week.” These statements assessed how often students talked with professors about “academic matters in class,” “academic matters outside of class,” “non-academic matters,” and “course grades” ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

Seven primary measures for background/defining variables were used in this study.

These included respondents’ age, income, high school GPA, mother’s highest level of education, father’s highest level of education, time status, and credits. Respondents’ *age* was collected using a 9-point scale: 1 = “under 18 years old”; 2 = “18 to 24 years old”; 3 = “25 to 31 years old”; 4 = “32 to 38 years old”; 5 = “39 to 45 years old”; 6 = “46 to 52 years old”; 7 = “53 to 59 years old”; 8 = “60 to 66 years old”; and 9 = “67 or older.” *Income* was collected on 12-point scale, ranging from “under \$10,000” (coded 1), “\$10,001 to 20,000” (coded 2), “up to \$110,001 or more” (coded 12). *High school GPA* was used to account for prior academic performance. Unweighted high school GPA’s were collected via class intervals: 1 = “0.5 to 0.9” (F to D); 2 = “1.0 to 1.4” (D to C–); 3 = “1.5 to 1.9” (C– to C); 4 = “2.0 to 2.4” (C to B–); 5 = “2.4 to 2.9” (B– to B); 6 = “3.0 to 3.4” (B to A–); and 7 = “3.5 to 4.0”

(A- to A). *Parent's highest level of education* for respondents mothers and fathers ranged as follows: "junior high" (coded 1), "GED" (coded 2), "high school" (coded 3), "certificate" (coded 4), "associate's" (coded 5), "bachelors" (coded 6), "master's or professional" (coded 7), and "doctorate" (coded 8). Students' enrollment intensity was assessed via their *time status*. This variable indicated whether students were enrolled full-time (coded 1) or part-time (coded 2). *Total credits* referred to the total number of courses completed successfully at the time they completed the CCSM. This variable was employed as a control to account for differential experiences across students' academic career in the sample based on the following scale: 1 = "none yet"; 2 = "1 to 14 credits"; 3 = "15 to 29 credits"; 4 = "30 to 44 credits"; 5 = "45 to 60 credits"; and 6 = "61 or more credits."

Three primary environmental factors were also employed in this study, including stressful life events, total dependents, and hours worked per week. *Stressful life events* accounted for the total number of stressful life events experienced by the respondent in the past 2 years. Examples of stressful life events provided to students included the following: divorce in family, loss of job, eviction, relationship breakup, incarceration, major change at work, illness in family, and death of a close friend or family member. *Total dependents* referred to the total number of individuals who were dependents on the respondent for financial support (e.g., children, siblings, parents, grandparents). The final environmental variable employed was *hours worked per week*. This variable measured the total number of hours students worked off campus each week. This variable was collected on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (*none*), 2 (*1-5 hr*), up through 10 (*41 or more hours per week*).

In addition to the background/defining and environmental variables, this study also employed measures of campus ethos. Specifically, the effect of students' perceptions of belonging with faculty, validation from faculty, and existence of racial/gender stereotypes about men of color were examined. *Faculty belonging* represented students' perceptions of belonging in class and in college from faculty members. This composite variable was derived from responses to five items (e.g., faculty care about my success in class, faculty value my presence in class, faculty believe I belong here;  $\alpha = .91$ ). Students responded to the statement using a 6-point scale of agreement, including: strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree. The second campus ethos factor, *faculty validation*, referred to the totality of validating communication received from faculty members. Students reported on the total number of times (on a scale from 0 to 5 or more) that professors communicated "that I can succeed in college," "that I belong at this institution," and "that I have the ability to do the work" ( $\alpha = .92$ ). This study also examined the degree to which students perceived that individuals in the campus setting held negative stereotypes about men from their racial/

ethnic group. This composite variable, referred to as *racial/gender stereotypes*, was derived from assessments of faculty, staff, and students ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

Four psychosocial factors were also employed in this study. These variables included degree utility, self-efficacy, locus of control, and intrinsic interest. Each of these variables was composite measures derived for four-items assessing students' self-reported agreement on a 6-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The following operational definitions were employed for each variable: (a) self-efficacy—students' confidence in their abilities to succeed in academic endeavors ( $\alpha = .90$ ); (b) degree utility—students' perception of the worthwhileness of their collegiate pursuits ( $\alpha = .89$ ); (c) locus of control—the extent to which students believe they have control over their academic futures ( $\alpha = .92$ ); and (d) intrinsic interest—the authentic interest students have in course content ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Please see Wood and Harris (2013) for an overview of these items and a report on their internal consistency and cross-racial/ethnic reliability. The following section will describe the multivariate data analysis procedures.

### *Analytic Approach*

Data from this study were examined in three primary stages. In the first stage, exploratory data analysis was conducted to examine the characteristics of the data set. As part of this stage, correlations among study variables were investigated to provide an enhanced understanding of interrelationships among the items and scales employed in this research. In the second stage, the researchers sought to determine the effect of the predictor variables on faculty–student engagement. Data in this study were analyzed using backwards multiple regression. In this procedure, an initial equation is computed which is inclusive of the predictor variables. Then, based on partial  $F$  tests for each predictor (as entered last into the equation), the effect of each predictor is assessed in context of the overall model contribution. Variables with less meaningful contributions were eliminated, resulted in subsequent models with a desired level of prediction with as few predictor variables as possible (Mertler & Vannatta, 2010). After determining an initial model, the third stage of this study generated a subsequent model examining the effect of items retained in the reduced model on faculty–student engagement with students' perception of the campus racial/gender climate serving as a moderating variable.

To reduce the potential effect of multicollinearity among predictor variables, all predictor variables employed in this research were standardized. All tolerance and variance inflation factors (VIFs) illustrated stability. One common challenge associated with secondary data analysis is missing values. Analysis of missing values indicated that the data were missing completely at random (MCAR). While the number of missing data was not a major concern,

the limited sample size required leveraging all responses. Therefore, the missing values in the data set were replaced and imputed using the expectation-maximization procedure. The next section presents the results from this study of Black male faculty–student engagement in urban community colleges.

## Results

The first stage of data analysis employed in this study examined the relationships between the predictor variables on faculty–student engagement. Of the 17 primary variables employed in this study, 11 had a significant association with the outcome. Annual income was negatively correlated with faculty–student engagement, suggesting that students at lower income levels have a higher degree of engagement with faculty ( $r = -.158, p < .01$ ). Total credit earned had a positive association with the outcome, demonstrating that students with higher credits also had higher degrees of engagement with faculty ( $r = .114, p < .05$ ). Enrollment status was also identified as having a significant negative association with the outcome ( $r = -.276, p < .001$ ), indicating that full-time students had higher levels of engagement with faculty than their part-time peers. The variable for working for pay off campus had a negative relationship with faculty–student engagement ( $r = -.116, p < .05$ ), indicating that students who worked fewer hours per week had more interactions with their faculty. All the psychosocial factors examined in this study demonstrated a significant, positive relationship with the outcome, including degree utility ( $r = .236, p < .001$ ), locus of control ( $r = .181, p = .001$ ), self-efficacy ( $r = .143, p < .01$ ), and intrinsic interest ( $r = .286, p < .001$ ). Thus, students who perceived college as worthwhile, felt a sense of control over their academic future, were confident in their academic abilities, and were authentically interested in what they were learning in school had higher levels of engagement with their faculty. In terms of campus ethos, faculty belonging ( $r = .196, p < .001$ ) and faculty validation ( $r = .426, p < .001$ ) were positively correlated with the outcome. As such, when students perceived that faculty members believed that they belonged in college and communicated to them that they have the ability to succeed and do college-level work, they were more likely to be engaged with those faculty members.

As noted in the previous section, this study employed backwards multiple regression to identify variables with the largest contributions to faculty–student engagement. Investigation of effects occurred over multiple models, with the final model converging on five iterations. The initial model accounted for 26.9% of the variance in the outcome ( $R^2 = .291, \text{adj } R^2 = .269$ ) and was significantly predictive of the outcome ( $F = 13.48, p < .001$ ). The subsequent models did not provide significant model improvement (according to the  $R^2 \Delta$ ), yet all models were significantly predictive of the outcome. The final

model had fewer predictive variables, but explained more variance than the prior models. This model accounted for 27.5% of the variance in faculty–student engagement ( $R^2 = .288$ , adj  $R^2 = .275$ ) and was predictive overall of faculty–student engagement ( $F = 22.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

As presented in Table 1, the final model included six predictors of the outcome, four of which were statistically significant. Total credits earned ( $\beta = .414$ , std.  $\beta = .085$ ) and self-efficacy ( $\beta = -.475$ , std.  $\beta = -.097$ ) were not significantly of the outcome ( $p = ns$ ). In terms of significant determinants, the model retained enrollment status, degree utility, intrinsic interest, and faculty validation. Enrollment in the academic term was negatively predictive of faculty–student engagement, suggesting that full-time students were more likely to benefit from interactions with faculty than their part-time peers ( $\beta = -1.20$ , std.  $\beta = -.246$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Both degree utility ( $\beta = .694$ , std.  $\beta = .142$ ) and intrinsic interest ( $\beta = .714$ , std.  $\beta = .146$ ) were identified as having a significant positive effect on the outcome ( $p < .05$ ). This suggests that a student with greater perceptions of the worthwhileness of his college pursuits (degree utility) and an authentic interest in course content (intrinsic interest) were more likely to have higher levels of faculty–student engagement.

Validation from faculty members was also identified as a significant predictor of faculty–student engagement ( $\beta = 1.702$ , std.  $\beta = .349$ ). Thus, when faculty members communicated to students that they had the ability to succeed, belonged in college, and had the ability to perform, they had greater levels of faculty–student engagement ( $p < .001$ ). Based on the standardized beta coefficients, the most salient predictor of faculty–student engagement in the model was validation from faculty (std.  $\beta = .349$ ), followed by time status (std.  $\beta = -.246$ ). In fact, an isolated model inclusive of only these predictors accounted for 23% of the variance in faculty–student engagement ( $R^2 = .235$ , adj  $R^2 = .230$ ).

This research was also concerned with whether students' perceptions of campus racial/gender climate served as a moderator for the relationship between the variables retained in the final model (e.g., time status, total credits, degree utility, self-efficacy, intrinsic interest, faculty validation) on faculty–student engagement. No significant interactions were detected for degree utility, intrinsic interest, self-efficacy, and faculty validation with campus racial/gender climate on faculty–student engagement ( $p = ns$ ). In contrast, perceptions of campus racial/gender climate significantly moderated the effect of time status on faculty–student engagement ( $\beta = .559$ , std.  $\beta = .115$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Specifically, full-time students who did not perceive their college environments as having stereotypes about Black men had greater engagements scores, whereas part-timers who perceived the environments in this manner had the lowest scores.

This study also identified perceptions of stereotypes about Black men as having a moderating effect on the relationship between total credits earned and faculty–student engagement ( $\beta = .494$ , std.  $\beta = .107$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Though not

**Table 1.** Determinants of Faculty–Student Engagement.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	
	B	SE	$\beta$	t
(Constant)	11.350	.225		50.343
Time status	-1.200***	.230	-.246	-5.223
Total credits	0.414	.230	.085	1.799
Degree utility	0.694*	.289	.142	2.406
Self-efficacy	-0.475	.284	-.097	-1.671
Intrinsic interest	0.714*	.322	.146	2.220
Faculty validation	1.702***	.238	.349	7.157

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

significant in the final model, total credits earned had a positive association with faculty–student engagement. The interaction model indicated that the positive relationship between total credits earned and faculty–student engagement was intensified when students had greater perceptions of stereotypes about Black men on campus. However, when little to no perceptions of stereotypes were evident, the slopes between total credits and engagement remained flat, which signifies there is no effect. In the following sections, we will discuss the implications for future research and provide recommendations for practice.

## Discussion

This study set out to identify determinants of faculty–student engagement for Black men in urban community colleges. Correlational analyses identified 11 variables that were associated with the outcome. In particular, correlation results demonstrate that environmental factors such as commuting, familial obligations, and stressful life events were not associated with faculty–student engagement as identified in prior research (e.g., Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Thompson, 2001; Wood & Ireland, 2014). That being said, hours worked per week was found to be associated with the outcome, a finding that complements results from Cotton and Wilson (2006) and Thompson (2001).

Subsequent regression analyses produced a final model with six variables, including the following: time status, total credits, degree utility, self-efficacy, intrinsic interest, and faculty validation. Of these variables, four were significantly predictive of the outcome. Specifically, full-time students were found to have higher scores for faculty–student engagement than their part-time peers. This finding was in line with research from Cotton and Wilson (2006) who found that part-time status was negatively attributed to faculty–student engagement by

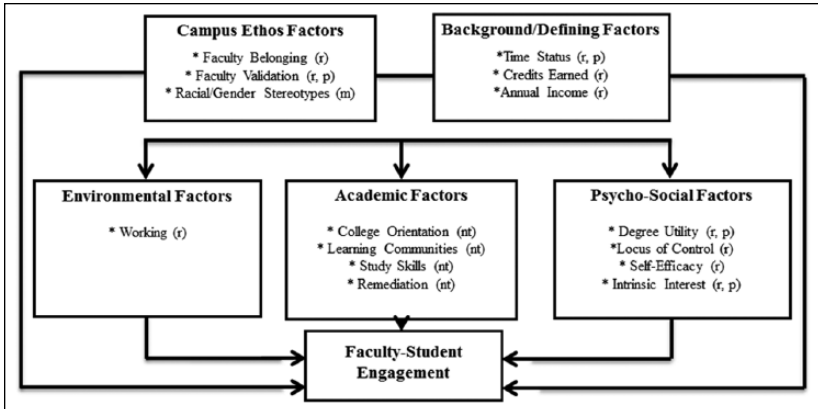
students. In addition, degree utility and intrinsic interest were both found to be positive determinants of faculty–student engagement. These findings represent a new addition to the literature on faculty–student engagement, demonstrating the important role that psychosocial factors play in student engagement.

However, the variable with the most significant contribution to the model was faculty validation. This finding suggested that the most meaningful contribution to faculty–student engagement deals with environments created by faculty members that communicate to students that they have the ability to do the work and succeed in college. The finding corroborates research from Harrison and Palacios (2014) and Bauer (2014), both who found that a welcoming campus climate (as typified by validation from faculty) was integral to Black male students' engagement with faculty. However, different from those studies, this current research has shown that, above and beyond perceptions of belonging from faculty, validation from faculty served as the strongest determinant of engagement with faculty for urban men. This finding may also illuminate prior work from Cotton and Wilson (2006) that showed that many students did not believe that faculty members actually wanted to engage with them. Possibly, validation from faculty served to curb such perceptions, laying the foundation for greater levels of engagement between faculty and students.

Results from this study also showed the importance of students' perceptions of the campus racial/gender climate on faculty–student engagement. Prior research has shown that Black men (and other men of color) experience perceptions of racism and stereotype's from faculty, which essentialize them as unintelligent thugs. As such, perceptions of stereotypes on campus about Black men were investigated for potential moderating effects on the relationship between the predictors and the outcome. This analysis illuminated the role of these perceptions in moderating faculty–student engagement for part-time students and those with more credits earned. Specifically, part-time students with greater perceptions of stereotypes in the college environment about Black men were more engaged than their peers with lower experiences with stereotypes. Possibly, this illuminates why Bauer (2014) did not find a relationship between time status, faculty validation, and faculty–student engagement as stereotypes played a moderating role among these relationships.

This research also found that the relationship between credits earned and faculty–student engagement was a function of their perceptions of stereotypes. In particular, greater perceptions of stereotypes in the campus climate intensified the relationship between credits earned and faculty–student engagement. Moreover, students with less experience in the college (based on credits) were more adversely influenced by perceptions of stereotypes. In contrast, those who had more experience in the college had greater engagement with faculty (possibly as a protective mechanism). Taken together, findings from this study demonstrate the important role that stereotypes play in





**Figure 2.** Revised model of faculty–student engagement for Black Men in urban community colleges.

Note. nt = not tested in this study; m = moderating effect; r = correlated with outcome; b = predictive of outcome.

student engagement. Informed by these findings, the authors present a revised theoretical model of faculty–student engagement (see Figure 2). The model is inclusive of prior results not explored in this study as well as the findings from the correlation and regression outcomes from this research. This model can serve to inform researchers and practitioners alike on the most salient contributions to students’ engagement with faculty. Guided by these findings, the next section presents recommendations for research and practice.

## Recommendations and Conclusion

While the traditional narrative of Black men on college campus focuses on disengagement from academically enriching and co-curricular involvement, this study presents evidence to support the assertion that Black men would like to be engaged, but there are barriers that potentially mitigate their ability to do so. Faculty and administrators at urban community colleges can play an important role in stimulating an environment to support meaningful engagement for Black men with faculty members. To achieve this goal, the following recommendations should be considered.

Student faculty interactions are important both inside the classroom and in more informal settings. Faculty should seek to engage with students around their career interest and try to help students make connections to their intrinsic interest in the subject matter and the course materials. One suggestion for doing so is to ensure that course content is presented in a socio-cultural

relevant manner that addresses the life opportunities and challenges faced by men of color. In higher education, there is typically a strong focus on students at the beginning and at the end of the process when students are graduating. It is important to create opportunities for these types of connections early on in the academic careers of Black men. Moreover, these relationships have to be cultivated and sustained through graduation and/or transfer.

Given our findings of part-time and full-time students' sensitivity to campus racial/gender climate, administrators have to assess the campus racial/gender climate. Part-time students are often marginalized due to their typical commuter status and may find it harder to make connections. This potential for feeling isolated may add considerable tension when these students feel the campus racial/gender climate is hostile toward those who identify as they do. Administrators need to create an environment that is welcoming to all students and not just the majority student population. This could be conveyed directly to students through targeted messaging that demonstrates the institutions desire to support and develop diverse populations or by signaling that all students matter.

Faculty members must understand that what they do and say (and "don't do" and "don't say") to students matters significantly to Black men. Faculty must be engaged through professional development workshops and new faculty orientations on the impact of their behaviors and classroom pedagogy. Faculty members within the institutions could share best practices (especially as it relates to validating practices) for supporting various racial/ethnic groups. This approach, if persistently offered to faculty members, will help to shift the institutional culture and negative campus racial gender over time.

In terms of areas for future research, more data are needed on the racial and gender identity of the faculty members who respondents reference when completing large-scale survey instruments. In other words, the conception the respondents have of faculty members could be considerably diverse. Future researchers need to tease out the differences the racial and gender identities have on Black men's engagement with faculty members. In addition, more research is needed on the role of institutions and how they support or impede the success of Black male engagement. Too often, the lack of engagement is attributed to student attributes and not whether the institution provided meaningful opportunities to be involved in enriching activities.

Black men in urban community colleges face unique challenges and this study helps to paint a clearer picture of their experience. As institutional agents, faculty members have a crucial role in nurturing all students. Some well-intentioned faculty members may need a little support to develop the skills necessary to be effective mentors and role models. Given the heightened awareness of issues facing Black men, urban community colleges must respond with data driven decision-making around how to implement

high-impact programs. These programs should not follow a “cookie-cutter” approach and should begin with an inquiry into the needs of the Black men at their campus. Institutions must understand the unique features of their campus and utilize evidence-based practices that contribute to positive outcomes around engagement, retention, and academic success. In other words, creating programs that are not meeting the needs of Black men in community colleges will do little to reduce the inequitable outcomes.

In closing, although we are well into the 21st century, the United States remains acutely divided by race. There are still daunting barriers to the equitable participation of Black men in community colleges. However, are community college’s infrastructure supporting Black men? Institutions must act with bold strokes to identify specific impediments to Black male participation and engagement, which will undoubtedly spur historic economic development into the second quarter of this century.

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### **Notes**

1. Less than half of one percent of these men enrolled in less than 2-year institutions
2. Due to sample-size limitations, outcomes for rural and town colleges were collapsed.

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