

A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY TO UNDERSTAND THE PERSISTENCE OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AT A HISTORICALLY BLACK
LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

by

Jill Triplett Ellis

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences that contributed to the persistence of African American males at a historically Black college. The problem was that the percentage of 18- to 24-year-old African American males enrolled in the nation's colleges and universities over the past two decades has been lower than the rates of White and Hispanic men and women, as well as African American women. The guiding theory in this study was Tinto's persistence theory. This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to obtain individual living experiences of African American male students enrolled in a historically Black, all-male, liberal arts college. Twelve participants were chosen for this study. The participants differed in classification, age, major, and family status. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and survey questions were used to collect, synthesize, and analyze the data obtained on the participants' lived experiences as African American male students enrolled in a historically Black, all-male, liberal arts college. The data lead to significant themes contributing to the satisfaction and ultimately the retention of African American males in higher education. The findings of the study provided a better understanding of the experiences that influenced their college achievement and identity formation as African American males in the United States.

Keywords: African American males, higher education, persistence, and retention

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my mother, Sherran Y. Winchester, who inspired me to hold on to my dream of earning a Ph.D. and passed on March 26, 2021. She never stopped believing that I would complete my dissertation one day. I miss her every day.

To my children, Patrick R. Triplett, Jr. and Jordan Ariel Triplett, whose P-20 educational experiences guided my career and inspired my research. Patrick's educational experiences began in a predominantly African American preschool and culminated with a degree from Morehouse College. Between those experiences, he attended predominantly white 1-12 schools and two predominantly white colleges. Though the epitome of academic and social integration from PK-16, Jordan experienced extensive microaggressions at predominantly white K-8 and graduate school. She earned degrees from Spelman College and Georgetown University. Their experiences at two of the nation's top Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) equipped them for successful careers and life. My promise to them was to be the best Mom that I could be, and I remain motivated to make them proud.

My husband, Marlon Ellis, provided moral, emotional, and financial support, which allowed me time to study and write. He constantly reminded me that we were in this together, and his support was unwavering and unconditional. Also, I could not ask for a more supportive "bonus" daughter, Jasmin. Somehow, you could keep up with all the steps of my approval process. Your notes on my whiteboard made me smile during my most frustrating moments.

To all rest of my family, friends, and Sorors, the distinguished ladies of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., your continuous support, and encouragement helped me throughout this journey. Every kind gesture and supportive statement meant the world to me and helped me get to the end of this journey.

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List of Abbreviations

Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE)

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Minority Serving Institutions (MSI)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Predominantly White Institutions (PWI)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the persistent experiences of African American male students at a historically Black college. The persistence of African American males in postsecondary education has been a pervasive issue in higher education in the United States for decades. Despite the increase in the percentage of 18- to 24-year-old African American males enrolled in the nation's colleges and universities over the past two decades, these students enrolled in college at a rate lower than their peers (Broomes, 2016; Harper, 2015; NCES, 2017). Although existing research identified common themes contributing to the enrollment, graduation, and retention of African American males in predominantly White institutions (PWIs), there was limited research on students' satisfaction and achievement at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) (Baker et al., 2019). According to Baker et al. (2020, 2021), there was limited relevant HBCU literature, with Arroyo and Gasman's (2014) work on student achievement and HBCUs being the only HBCU-specific theoretical study. Chapter One established the complete framework for this study and includes the background, with historical, social, and theoretical contexts, which provides the preliminary basis for this research. A statement of the problem, its significance, and the purpose of this research are included, with the research questions and relevant definitions.

Background

The Background section provided the historical, social, and theoretical contexts of African American males in higher education. The historical context exposed how racism has thwarted African American males' academic and economic success, while the social context described the social implications of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v Board of Education* on this

phenomenon. Finally, the theoretical context highlighted the prominent theory supporting research on African American males' persistence in higher education.

Historical Context

The history of African American education in the United States has been a struggle attributed to laws prohibiting enslaved Africans from receiving an education. On the other hand, Free Black people rarely acquired formal schooling (Bartz, 2019; Jenkins, 2006). From 1896 until *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, *Plessy v. Ferguson* provided the legal foundation for segregated schools by race (i.e., African American, and White). School districts with two sets of schools—one for African American students and another for White children—were referred to as having a dual education system from 1896 to 1954 (Bartz, 2019). The educational resources available to African American children were frequently inferior to those available to White students. While there were several excellent all-Black schools throughout state-imposed segregation, there would have been many more if enough resources had been available (Heller, 2019). Since African Americans were denied education for nearly two centuries, the impact has been immeasurable on the African American community, their families, and many of the population individually (Bartz, 2019; Bell, 1995; Jenkins, 2006). Most American society, including many African Americans, see African American males as problems that need to be controlled, handled, or managed somehow (Bell, 1995; Brooms, 2017; Goings, 2018; Harper, 2012, 2014). Popular culture and media portrayals of African American males promoted the concept that they are a problem, scary, untrustworthy, and unattractive species (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Though the study of African American males in America's educational system, notably higher education, is not new, their enrollment and graduation remained a persistent issue without commitment to a resolution. Further study of this critical issue must include

acknowledging the social, psychological, political, economic, and educational racism, which has perpetuated their "underachievement, backward progressions, and lack of inclusion" in higher education (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p.127; Jenkins, 2006). Although higher education has existed in America for more than 300 years, it has been less than half of that time since it was illegal for African Americans to be taught how to read (Bartz, 2019; Jenkins, 2006). However, education was seen as the primary conduit to gain access and success in the African American community. Many African American leaders and educators continue to persist in improving education because of this value. There have been significant variations of degree attainment levels among equally qualified Whites and African Americans since African American college students tend to be relegated to crowded, underfunded, open-access, two- and four-year colleges (CCCSE, 2014). Although many African Americans are unprepared for college, White students who are equally unprepared continue to access more and better postsecondary opportunities (CCCSE, 2014; (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

One of the most disturbing and frustrating aspects of racism is that even if individual Whites are against racism, they nevertheless benefit from a system that favors Whites collectively (Koppleman, 2017; Lucey & White, 2017). Furthermore, regardless of the prejudices against Whites, non-Whites do not have the social, cultural, or institutional influence or power required to substantiate their prejudices (Bartz, 2019; Koppleman, 2017; Kruse et al., 2018). Therefore, it is not racism. Federal, state, and institutional policies have been implemented to alleviate the achievement and educational attainment levels of students of color in higher education. Despite more than 50 years of programs and initiatives and growth in postsecondary attendance, disparities in college-going, enrollment, and retention rates remain. With changes in campus demographics, higher education has shifted its focus to improving campus climate. The

data showed that the nation's colleges and universities must prepare themselves to serve a more racially and ethnically diverse population than at any other time in the nation's history (Kruse et al., 2018; Lucey & White, 2017).

Social Context

Brown v. Board of Education had a permanent negative effect on the African American community. Though students of color were not typically in danger of being physically assaulted going to school, acquiring an education remained a problem for African American students, particularly males (Koppleman, 2017; Kruse et al., 2018; Peters-Davis & Shultz, 2016). The quality of education in our nation's public schools has been most assuredly based on race and class. Visit any major city in this country and choose a school in the poorest section of town. It is more likely to be African American. On the other hand, if a school was chosen in the more affluent area of the city, the composition is more likely to be White and could include Asian and Hispanic students (Koppleman, 2017; Kruse et al., 2018; Peters-Davis & Shultz, 2016). Though African Americans were brought to this country hundreds of years ago, their advancement as a race has not been comparable to other ethnic groups.

The racial achievement gap, zero-tolerance policies, overrepresentation in special education, underrepresentation in gifted and talented programs, and other indicators all point to this conclusion. Although most research on African American males described them as indifferent about their education and fearful of high academic achievement, some studies highlighted high-achieving African American college students that still wanted to use their academic success to inspire others (Brooms, 2017; Goings, 2016; Harper, 2015; Simmons, 2019).

Theoretical Context

Tinto's (1975) student integration model or persistence theory provided the framework used to analyze the persistence of African American males in college, barriers to success, and strategies for improvement. According to existing research, parental education, family background, high school GPA, standardized test scores, and institutional factors all played a role in student persistence (Museus et al., 2018; Rhoden, 2017; Simmons, 2017; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Students with a sense of belonging in college correlated with a higher likelihood of graduating. African American students' persistence can also be attributed to college participation, adjustment, and support, including involvement in campus organizations, educational activities, and maintaining meaningful relationships with faculty, staff, and students. These external influences motivated students to persist in college (Museus et al., 2018; Rhoden, 2017; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Tinto's theory of persistence has been applied to students of color in PWIs, "the extent to which these theories—in whole or in part—apply to minority-serving institutions, such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) has not been studied in-depth" (Baker et al., 2021, p. 34). Significant revisions and expansions to the existing theory were made by documenting how these experiences led to positive social and academic integration of African American male students (Rhoden, 2017; Tinto, 1975, 1993; Wilson et al., 2013).

Problem Statement

The problem has been that the educational attainment gap between African American males and the total percentage of overall enrollment in the nation's colleges and universities of other racial and ethnic groups continues to widen (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2015; NCES, 2019, 2020; Simmons, 2019). The achievement gap and academic attainment levels for students of color remained significantly lower than for White students graduating from high school and

college (Hutchinson & McAlister, 2020). In 2000, African American males represented 25% of the total college enrollment and 33% in 2018 (NCES, 2019). Between 2000 and 2018, overall college enrollment rates increased for 18- to 24-year-old males from 33% to 38% and females from 38% to 44%. Among males, college enrollment rates were higher in 2018 than in 2000 for those who were White (39% v. 36%), compared to African American (33% v. 25%) and Hispanic 32% v. 18 % (NCES, 2019). The rates for African American males have been consistently lower. These data were essential to understand the pipeline and baseline for African American males' college-going rates before identifying solutions to alleviate the problem.

A gap existed in documenting their overall satisfaction, desire to return, and engagement at historically Black institutions, specifically the nation's only higher education institution dedicated to the college degree attainment of African American males to improve their enrollment, graduation, and retention. Consequently, identifying and exploring those factors that contributed to the overall satisfaction of African American males with their college experience at an HBCU and an intention to return to complete the desired degree were critical.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to interpret the persistence experience of African American male students at a historically Black college. At this stage in the research, persistence was generally defined as the fall-to-fall retention of African American males in college. Tinto's student integration model or persistence theory served as the study's guiding theory. The study's findings improved researchers understanding of the lived experiences that influenced their college success and identity formation of African American males in the United States.

Significance of the Study

Despite *Brown v. the Board of Education*, racial and socioeconomic disparities remained, particularly among African American students at all educational levels. The achievement gap and academic attainment levels for students of color remained significantly lower than those for White students graduating from high school and college (Hutchinson & McAlister, 2020). The disparities between the educational experiences of African American males have been historically laden with the perpetuation of racism and politics, which has impeded educational and health care reform solutions that could change their trajectories. The racism inherent in the nation's educational system perpetuated pre-college barriers that impact African American males' enrollment, retention, and graduation in college.

Empirical

This study aimed to address a significant gap in documenting the persistence of African American males at historically Black institutions, specifically, the nation's only higher education institution dedicated to the college attainment of African American males to improve their enrollment, graduation, and retention (Baker et al., 2020; Broady et al., 2017, Johnson et al., 2017; NCES, 2017, 2019). The study's themes, subthemes, and phenomenological descriptions were empirically significant since they added new material and reinforced existing literature. The findings from interviews with African American males enrolled at the nation's only higher education school for African American males could have substantial educational implications. Like other traditional students, African American males require intellectual and social integration to complete their studies (Baker et al., 2021; Tinto, 1975; Wilson et al., 2013). However, there was limited literature to validate or disprove the need for African American males matriculating

at HBCUs to be academically and socially integrated. The findings of this study offered improved strategies and policies to enhance their persistence in higher education.

Theoretical

Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2012) student integration model or persistence theory provided the guiding framework for this study on the persistence of African American males in higher education. It was essential to understand the experiences of African American males at PWIs to compare them with African American males' experiences at HBCUs meaningfully. Participation in campus activities, particularly Black Greek organizations, decreased the isolation of African American male students enrolled in PWIs (Simmons, 2019). Furthermore, developing a connection with minority faculty members improved the persistence of these students (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Simmons, 2019). Connecting with faculty who can relate to one's experiences was essential. It should be noted that these findings were consistent with the literature as they related to cognitive and non-cognitive factors that contributed to the persistence of African American males in PWIs (Simmons, 2019). The aforementioned research supported significant revisions and expansions of the existing theory to document the lived experiences of African American male students' positive social and academic integration (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012; Wilson et al., 2013).

Practical

This qualitative, phenomenological study was significant because it was a departure from using the results to demonstrate best practices; instead, it sought to advise educators to unpack the complex layers of African American male students to improve their educational experiences by building better relationships (Simmons, 2019; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012; Wilson et al., 2013). Educators at all levels of the educational continuum must advocate for quality education for all

students, regardless of the challenges students experience, including disparities associated with race and socioeconomic class. It is incumbent upon educators to recognize that their power extends beyond their classrooms and positively or negatively affects the entire school environment.

Research Questions

This transcendental, phenomenological study was on the persistence of African American males in a historically Black liberal arts college. The research questions emanated from the problem with the achievement gap and academic attainment levels for African American males remaining significantly lower than any other students from high school and college, and the purpose of this research is to learn directly from undergraduate African American males what it took to persist and navigate their trajectories through college beyond matriculation (Hutchinson & McAlister, 2020; Simmons, 2017). Some African American males currently enrolled in college chose to remain or complete their degree because they were inspired by their parents (Irvine, 2019). Other reasons included their friends' or family members' determination to succeed academically or be a positive example for others in their communities by being successful academically despite the obstacles (Irvine, 2019). This study obtained insight from the students instead of speculations about their lived experiences.

Central Research Question

What were the persistent experiences of African American males enrolled at a historically Black liberal arts college?

Sub-Question One

What personal reasons contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants attending an HBCU?

Sub-Question Two

What social experiences contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants attending an HBCU?

Sub-Question Three

What institutional experiences contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants attending an HBCU?

Definitions

1. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) – the legal case based on the mandatory or permissible segregation of Black and White children in public schools. However, the schools were equal or brought to equal standards in other physical respects, including buildings, teaching curricula, teachers' salaries, or qualifications (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, 1954).
2. *Graduation* - the number of students entering the institution as full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students in a particular year (cohort), by race/ethnicity and gender; the number completing their program within 150% of average time to completion (NCES, 2021).
3. *Historically Black Colleges and Universities* - colleges and universities that were founded before 1964 with the primary goal of educating African Americans (NCES, 2019). These institutions were formed and grew in legal segregation.
4. *Persistence* - the description of postsecondary students who had attained a degree or were still enrolled six years after entering college (Cataldi, 2018).
5. *Persistence Theory* – the theory that suggests that students need academic (formal) and social integration (informal) to persist in college (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012).

6. *Plessy v. Ferguson of Louisiana*, 163.U.S.537 (1896) – the legal case based on the controversial U.S. Supreme Court decision to "separate but equal" doctrine to determine the constitutionality of racial segregation laws. *Plessy v. Ferguson* was the first major inquiry into the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment's (1868) equal-protection clause, which prohibits the states from denying "equal protection of the laws" to any person within their jurisdictions (*Plessy v. Ferguson of Louisiana*, 1896).
7. *Predominantly White institutions (PWIs)* - the description of institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or more of the student enrollment (Woods et al., 2019).
8. *Retention* - the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution. For four-year institutions, it is the percentage of first-time, degree-seeking students who re-enroll from the previous fall semester (NCES, 2021).

Summary

The persistence of African American males in postsecondary education has been a pervasive issue in higher education in the United States for decades (Brooms, 2017; Harper, 2015; NCES, 2019, 2020; Simmons, 2019). Despite the increase in the percentage of 18- to 24-year-old African American males enrolled in the nation's colleges and universities, these students have enrolled in college significantly and consistently lower than their peers. Although existing research (Boyras et al., 2016; Brooms, 2017, 2018; Cerezo et al., 2015; Clark & Brooms, 2018; Druery & Brooms, 2019; Goings, 2016, 2018; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Tolliver, III & Miller, 2018) identified common themes contributing to the enrollment, graduation, and retention of African American males in PWIs, there has been limited research on students' satisfaction and success at HBCUs (Hutchinson & McAlister, 2020; Museus et al.,

2018; Simmons, 2017). Research on African American males' persistence is essential, remains relevant, and must continue until their college enrollment, retention, and graduation rates are similar. Based on the lived experiences of African American males attending one of the nation's premier historically Black institutions, the intent of this study was to discover those factors that contributed to their persistence and contribute to the limited research on student persistence at HBCUs. Chapter One described the study's framework by providing the background (historical, social, and theoretical), problem, purpose, significance, and the research questions studied.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The achievement gap and academic attainment levels for minorities graduating from high school and college remained much lower than for White students (Hutchinson & McAlister, 2020, NCES, 2019). Disparities in African American males' educational experiences have long been associated with the persistence and perpetuation of racism and political inaction, obstructing educational and healthcare reform initiatives that could have improved their persistence in higher education. Racism embedded in the nation's educational system has perpetuated pre-college hurdles that affect African American males' college enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. Although researchers have identified common themes that have contributed to rates of African American males' enrollment, graduation, and retention in predominantly White institutions (PWIs), there was limited research on these students' satisfaction and success at Historically Black Colleges and Universities or HBCU (Baker et al., 2020, 2021; Goings, 2016, 2018; Harper, 2012; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Preston & Palmer, 2018; Shappie & Debb, 2019). There were two focal areas: factors that contributed to the overall satisfaction of African American males with their college experiences at HBCUs and their intention to return to complete their chosen degrees. The following theoretical framework section introduced this chapter as it relates to the topic of this study. Chapter Two also included a synthesis of recent literature regarding the persistence of African American males in college, barriers to their success, and improvement strategies.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's (1975,1993, 2012) student integration model or persistence theory provided the necessary context to understand how the persistence of African American males in higher

education has been impacted, limited, and influenced. Tinto's persistence theory is the most reputable theory on college persistence (Wilson et al., 2013). It provided the appropriate framework to analyze the persistence of African American males in college, barriers to success, and strategies for improvement.

Student Integration Model

Although many scholars have developed theories about why students leave college and why they persist, student retention has remained a critical issue in higher education for decades, regardless of the various student populations and institutional types (Braxton, 2017; Choi et al., 2019; French, 2017). Tinto is credited as the first scholar to conceptualize student departure based on connections between students and their environments (Choi et al., 2019). Tinto applied Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide to explain how individuals adopt various forms of dropout behavior. Tinto's work specifies the conditions under which different dropouts could occur (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012). With specific reference to Durkheim's treatment of suicide, his primary structural argument is insufficient to explain the distribution of suicide within society among differing individuals (Kolodziej-Sarzynska, 2019; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012). The student integration model considers socioeconomic status, high school experiences, a community of residence, and individual characteristics such as sex, ability, race, and ethnicity. Personal expectations and motivational traits (such as career and educational expectations and degrees of academic achievement drive) also impact whether students stay in college or drop out (Simmons, 2017; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012). In addition, a student's desire to attend college is influenced by their family's history, precollege education, and personal characteristics (Choi et al., 2019). As students advance through college, they are exposed to an academic system based on their academic success and intellectual growth. Students also interact with the social system, including

peer-group relationships and interactions with instructors or staff. Their academic experiences lead to academic integration, strengthening their dedication to their objective (graduation); the more academically integrated students are, the more likely they will graduate. Similarly, their social experiences lead to social integration, reinforcing their loyalty to their college as an institution. Students who feel more socially integrated at their college are less likely to leave. Academic and social integration occurs over time, rather than as a single academic or social engagement. The degree to which students' objective and institutional commitments are weak impacts whether or not the aim of graduating from college is achieved, i.e., whether attrition occurs (Choi et al., 2019; Simmons, 2017, 2019; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012). In contrast, the strength of these commitments helps students stay in school.

According to Tinto's (1975) model, there were two primary domains: the *educational system* and *academic and social integration*. The first domain was the *educational system*. College students who persisted in college and graduated participated in student activities to gain knowledge and familiarity with the environment (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012). Astin's (1999) study showed that student interaction and involvement with teachers increased their persistence in completing their degrees. Even though interactions with teachers were significant to racial minority students' success, African American students were still unable to form strong bonds with Caucasian professors, who are overrepresented in higher education (Simmons, 2017, 2019). The second domain was *academic and social integration*. Tinto's model assumed that institutional experiences affect social and academic integration persistence. The indirect route considered excessive social and academic integration stages conditional on one's choice to proceed with their studies. According to Tinto's theory, the decision to drop out from school

stemmed from student characteristics and the extent of a student's academic, environmental, and social integration in an institution.

Three institutional factors or characteristics were correlated with college persistence (Connolly, 2016; French, 2017; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012). *The institutional type* was one characteristic associated with college persistence. Public institutions tend to have higher dropout rates than private institutions because much of the student selection process takes place before students enter private colleges. Additionally, two-year colleges had higher dropout rates than four-year colleges. The average first-to-second-year persistence rate in the United States was 68.5%, ranging from 56.4% for two-year public colleges to 81.5% for private doctorate-granting universities (Simmons, 2017; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012). The total persistence rate for HBCUs was 61.7%. The higher attrition rates at two-year colleges were primarily attributed to an institution's quality of advising; inadequate campus connections with faculty, staff, and students; inadequate academic support services; and inadequate financial assistance (Connolly, 2016; French, 2017; Simmons, 2017).

Another characteristic associated with college persistence was *the quality of the college* (Connolly, 2016; French, 2017; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012). It was reasonable to expect that the quality and types of institutions were consistent with the educational value and levels of college persistence at those institutions, particularly with highly selective institutions, which were more likely to have higher retention and graduation rates. Consequently, academic integration was essential for persistence, given an institution's prominence in comparison to social integration. The most prestigious institutions have a long history of using their admissions policies to protect the elite's privileges, thereby using the selection process to enhance graduation rates significantly (Connolly, 2016; Eller & DiPrete, 2018; French, 2017). The four-year

completion rates for most Ivy League universities ranged between 85% and 90% (U.S. News and World Report, 2017). The six-year graduation rate of first-time, full-time first-year students at top public colleges was 86%, only 59% at the least selective public universities (Eller & DiPrete, 2018). Only a small percentage of minorities and students from low-income families benefitted from the best institutions. Approximately 85% of these students enrolled in institutions with little resources. To understand the influence of college quality on student persistence, understanding the quality of the academic institutions and their impact on students' lived experiences in higher education on degree completion rates was imperative (Connolly, 2016; Eller & DiPrete, 2018; French, 2017).

Institutional size also was associated with college persistence (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012). Smaller colleges have a greater student achievement range than more prominent colleges, even after accounting for student characteristics (Connolly, 2016; French, 2017). Since the academic achievement and dropout rates were directly related, smaller, high-quality institutions tend to have higher persistence rates. Those institutions typically have lower student-faculty ratios and promote student-faculty interaction, influencing students' academic performance and mental development (Connolly, 2016; French, 2017; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012). Larger institutions often exhibited a more heterogeneous student composition and provided a broader range of student activities, affecting students' social integration into the institution. Lack of academic preparedness in high school places students at the highest risk of dropping out. If students do not receive a proper educational foundation in high school, they will find it difficult to succeed in college. The characteristic that most significantly influences persistence is academic integration. As previously discussed, student persistence theory was developed in PWIs. Because student

experiences and persistence rates vary by institution type, Baker et al. (2014) translated Tinto's PWI-based theoretical work into testable hypotheses that differ based on institutional type.

Social inclusion refers to students' perceptions of their degree of social connection with others and their level of correspondence to a college or university's attitudes, beliefs, norms, and values (Durkheim, 1951; Tinto, 1975). First-year student persistence in higher education was one of the primary, intermediate outcomes used to measure the success of undergraduate students (Baker et al., 2020; Braxton, 2008, 2014, 2016). Braxton et al.'s (2014, 2016) theory of student persistence in residential colleges and universities, an expansion of Tinto's model of student integration, indicates gender, race or ethnicity, parental education, and average high school grades all had an impact on a residential student's first commitment to their institution, which was frequently based on expectations.

This initial commitment had an impact on that student's social integration. Therefore, increased social integration contributed to increased student commitment to an institution, which was a significant predictor of student persistence (Tinto, 1975; 1993; 2012). Critical aspects of the student persistence theory related to the influence of six precursors of social integration: affordability, institutional commitment to student well-being, institutional integrity, potentially shared competence, active social adjustment, and psychosocial participation.

Baker et al. (2020) investigated the concept of college student persistence in commuter colleges and universities, suggesting that a PWI-based idea of student persistence is (a) applicable to investigations of the commuter HBCU context and (b) helpful for determining empirically supported antecedents of student persistence (i.e., tutorials, mental development, subsequent institutional commitment, persistence). Three themes emerged from their work: organizational behavior, internal social environment, and external support from significant others

(Baker et al., 2020, 2021; Braxton et al., 2008, 2014, 2016). First, concerning organizational behavior, whether students persist at their commuter HBCU appeared to be linked to their perceptions of the institution's commitment to its stated mission and aims (Baker et al., 2020, 2021). It was important to note that the intention was not to focus on the negative aspects of HBCUs, which were often misconstrued or falsely depicted, but to identify areas of improvement. Second, the internal social environment is crucial, as student persistence could be attributed to a student's social affiliations. Social connections could be challenging to achieve at most commuter schools, regardless of sector or institutional type, since the classroom was students' primary social networking opportunity. Students requiring higher levels of social interaction often cannot thrive in this type of environment. Finally, a supportive home environment contributes to students' persistence and college completion goals (Baker et al., 2020, 2021), particularly at PWIs (Braxton et al., 2008, 2014, 2016).

Related Literature

African American males face numerous social, political, and economic obstacles that influence their life trajectories and outcomes (Arias & Xu, 2019; Bennett, 2021). The impact of cultural demands and expectations and the adverse effects of racism may produce concerns, challenges, and dilemmas for African American males. One of the most glaring concerns confronting African American men is mortality. African American males have the shortest life expectancy of any population group in the United States (Arias & Xu, 2019; Bennett, 2021). Furthermore, African American males are at a higher risk of premature mortality (i.e., mortalities occurring in infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, or late adulthood). Multiple health and well-being indicators continue to show that African American males face myriad environmental, psychological, and social obstacles that negatively impact not just their

life course trajectories but also their total life expectancy (Bennett, 2021; Cottrell et al., 2019; Hart et al., 1998; Mode et al., 2016).

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019), African American male newborns aged 0–4 are four times as likely as White male peers to die in homicides. Tragically, African American males have comparatively high mortality rates before entering kindergarten (Arias & Xu, 2019; Bennett, 2021). Unfortunately, according to all social science and public health standards, the greater incidence of homicide among African American males is an unfortunate trend. African American males have a higher risk of homicide throughout their lives than any other population. Homicide is the primary cause of death for African American males ages 15–24 (Arias & Xu, 2019; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). African Americans are at five times greater risk of dying through homicide compared to their White male contemporaries. Despite this trend, no government-sanctioned social welfare or public health policy efforts have been proposed to help mitigate its effects (Bennett, 2021; Cottrell et al., 2019; Hart et al., 1998; Mode et al., 2016).

Addressing the growing disparities in access to education and scholarly achievement among non-White students must be a priority for the nation's teacher education programs is another factor. For decades, scholars have argued that the nation's teachers should be diverse and representative of the students they teach (Cherng & Davis, 2017, 2019; Hill, 2017; Hutchinson & McAlister, 2020). Teacher training programs and school policies can simultaneously enhance and detract from the school as a learning community. However, the problem remains. However, the apparent inequalities in teachers' racial and ethnic groups impact all elements of instruction and the communities. Therefore, the evident disparities in teachers' racial and ethnic origins and the communities they serve must be addressed before the huge achievement gaps between kids of

color and their White counterparts can be closed. Therefore, the "demographic divide" between predominantly White, monolingual, and middle-class instructors and diverse K-12 student populations underlines that this is still a substantial barrier to teacher preparation, which is problematic for advancing multicultural education (Cherng & Davis, 2017, 2019).

Teacher training programs must ensure that new teachers entering the classroom have embraced and mastered appropriate multicultural competencies. According to U.S. Department of Education data, students from racial and ethnic minority groups represent the majority in America's public schools (Cherng & Davis, 2017, 2019; Hill, 2017; Hutchinson & McAlister, 2020). Data also show that over 80% of public school and nearly 90% of private school K-12 teachers are non-Hispanic Whites. Consequently, one must ask how one can move multicultural education to the forefront if the demographic composition of teachers and their students remains the same. The success of all students is contingent on the success of their instructors, which is determined by their ability to operate effectively across racial, ethnic, and cultural inequalities (Cherng & Davis, 2017, 2019; Hill, 2017; Hutchinson & McAlister, 2020). Addressing the shortage of minority teachers is a critical issue. All states must develop and adopt effective and comprehensive efforts to increase the number of minorities in higher education and the teaching profession. It will not be possible to create multicultural education in a silo, and both issues must be resolved together if students are to benefit.

The racism inherent in the nation's educational system perpetuates pre-college barriers that affect African American males' enrollment, retention, and graduation in higher education. African American males have the lowest retention and graduation rates among their peers (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Broomes, 2016; Harper, 2015; and NCES, 2017). Despite the Supreme Court's holding in *Brown v. the Board of Education*, racial and socioeconomic disparities remain,

particularly for Brown and Black students at all educational levels. The achievement gap and academic attainment levels for students of color remain significantly lower than for White students graduating from high school and college. The disparities between the educational experiences of African American males and other groups have historically been laden with the perpetuation of racism and its implementation through politics, which has stymied educational and healthcare reform solutions that could change their trajectories (Bell, 1973, 2008).

Examining the literature reveals three significant themes relating to African American males: a historical perspective on their educational experiences, strategies to improve their persistence in higher education, and institutional success stories relating to initiatives targeted to improve their college retention and graduation rates.

Historical and Educational Experiences

One must consider the historical and educational experiences of African American males before taking steps to address their rates of college persistence. The trajectory of African American males and societal influences affect their success (Broomes, 2016; Harper, 2015; Hill, 2017; NCES, 2017). Pre-college programs were designed to improve the college success rates of African American males (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Harper, 2015; Hill, 2017; NCES, 2017). Ensuring African American males progress through the college pipeline successfully requires more than simple college admission. Strategies to improve the persistence of African American males should be intentional (Brooms, 2017; Cerezo et al., 2015; Tolliver, III & Miller, 2018) and include mental health support (Boyras et al., 2016). Finally, scholars have documented the positive experiences of African American males in college, and these should be studied and replicated to broaden the opportunities for college enrollment (Brooms, 2018; Druery & Brooms, 2019; Goings, 2016, 2018; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

For instance, Black Male Initiative (BMI) programs have contributed to the positive experiences of African American males over the last two decades. These programs have grown considerably in the number of colleges and universities (Brooms, 2018; Clark & Brooms, 2018; Druery & Brooms, 2019). BMIs have improved Black male students' retention and graduation rates. They aim to enhance the sense of belonging on campus by strengthening their sociocultural capital, providing academic and social assistance, and creating a safe space for Black male peer bonding. As a result, several BMI initiatives are designed to promote the retention, perseverance, and initiation of Black males (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012). BMI programs provide African American male students with social and cultural (sociocultural) resources based on their networks and their resources to help them transition to college (Brooms, 2017, 2018; Clark & Brooms, 2018; Druery & Brooms, 2019).

In a recent study (Brooms, 2019) on BMI programs, the author found that participants indicated that the BMI community acknowledged and valued their presence and viewpoints and provided a crucial buffer for students from the greater school milieu, which they perceived as isolated and alienating at times (Brooms, 2017, 2018; Clark & Brooms, 2018). In addition, participants felt connected and supported inside the BMI group and, most importantly, that they were not alone. Students valued academic and social support, re-envisioned themselves (and their futures) due to their engagement and cultural connection experiences, and were uplifted by the group's focus. Students' efforts and goals for college and personal success were realized by these connecting factors and elements of their BMI experience. BMI in this study encourages them to get more involved on campus and further their personal development and awareness (Brooms, 2017, 2018, 2019; Clark & Brooms, 2018).

Scholars also have conducted studies to determine whether participation in high-quality summer bridge programs make a long-term difference in the retention, grade point average (GPA), and graduation rates of African American students. At one midsized public HBCU, scholars tracked the retention, progression, and graduation rates between 2008–2012 of participants in the school's summer bridge program (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Scott & Sharp, 2019). The researchers analyzed nine variables across three cohorts of students, totaling 1,891 participants). All cohorts of the summer bridge participants achieved substantially greater university GPAs and retention rates for their second and third years of college were significantly higher. Female participants showed the most significant gains in all categories, with higher GPAs and retention rates. On the other hand, male participants' GPAs and retention rates were not significantly higher (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Scott & Sharp, 2019). Although this study was limited to one HBCU, it provides baseline data for further research on developmental summer season bridge students at diverse institutions necessary to assess their effectiveness fully.

Several studies have focused on the educational experiences of African American males, including those with special needs (Hill, 2017) and first-generation college students (Hines et al., 2019). African American males become fodder for the school-to-prison pipeline (Boyratz et al., 2016), further reducing college attendance. There also has been considerable research on the school-to-prison pipeline. This phenomenon refers to those structural factors both within and outside the United States public school system that estrange promising young students from school and thrust them into the criminal justice system (Boyratz et al., 2016). This pipeline rests upon laws, policies, and practices that are hyper-focused on enforcing discipline in public schools while simultaneously serving as the conduit for the implicit biases against students of

low socioeconomic status, students of color, students with disabilities, and students who are male (Hill, 2017; Hines et al., 2019).

These students are disproportionately subjected to discipline, and many end up in the school-to-prison pipeline. As a result, these students often are singled out and experience harsh disciplinary practices, such as suspension, expulsion, and even arrest (Boyraz et al., 2016; Hill, 2017; Hines et al., 2019). Consequently, these students are more likely to disengage from school, leading them toward the criminal justice system rather than college. For young males of color, micro-level school experiences are a persistent source of anguish. Often these feelings are followed by system-level behaviors that contribute to the derailment of a college-going path for the students. The role of school culture is crucial to explore since young males of color are frequently caught in a web of school punishment, tracking, and harassment, which often jeopardizes opportunities to develop a solid college-going identity (Huerta et al., 2018; Rios, 2021).

High schools build cultures that either encourage or discourage college attendance (Huerta et al., 2018; Rios, 2021). The success of low-income young males from minority backgrounds is predicated on their academic and career choices (Simmons, 2017). Messages to avoid the typical societal pitfalls and stereotypes many minority males face, such as teenage parenthood, gang participation, and entering the workforce instead of completing high school motivate these students. These individuals may have to consider atypical options to pursue a successful life, involving joining the military instead of attending college. For most low-income young males of minority backgrounds, the cost of college may cause them to consider the military as their first option (Huerta et al., 2018; Simmons, 2017).

Two significant challenges for minority students to enroll in and graduate from college are accurate information on college preparedness and costs to ensure that all students have an opportunity to improve their lives through higher education (Huerta et al., 2018; Simmons, 2017). Due to discrepancies in financial resources, high-quality curricula, computer/internet access, and availability of experienced teachers during their years in the pre-college educational system, students of color may have academic hurdles in college (Pierszalowski et al., 2018). These considerations show that academic challenges are caused by the opportunity structure rather than academic competence. As a result, assigning high-impact learning experiences based on academic performance might be problematic. In addition, students from low-income families frequently work while in school to help pay for their education. Furthermore, students from underrepresented groups are often more apprehensive than White students about their ability to pay for college (Pierszalowski et al., 2018).

Strategies to Improve Persistence

Although *Brown v. Board of Education* provided an enforcement mechanism to facilitate enrollment changes in higher education, the ruling did not deter some negative stereotypes of African Americans, particularly African American males. Those stereotypes still exist in school and college settings (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Desombre et al., 2018; Hutchinson & McAlister, 2020; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). More recent research has been consistent with the findings in earlier studies, which illustrate the difficulty people of color face under suspicions of their intellectual inferiority from peers (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Desombre et al., 2018).

Since most school settings are defined based on the majority group, several strategies can be implemented to address inclusiveness, including communications that emphasize that a school values diversity, increase the visibility of minorities in positions of authority; use gender- and

race-fair tests that communicate their fairness, and that they are being administered to facilitate learning, not to measure innate capability or affirm stereotypes, and reminding students of their similarities by promoting cooperative classrooms. In their study, Boyd and Mitchell identify how African American males have persisted in higher education despite facing stereotypes.

Participants in their research discussed their experiences with stereotypes, how they managed those experiences, how the experiences influenced their future endeavors, and how they used strategies to dispel stereotypes and persist through threatening experiences (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Desombre et al., 2018; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Academic Disparities

Equally qualified Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics have significantly different outcomes since African American and Hispanic college students tend to be relegated to crowded, underfunded, open-access, two- and four-year colleges (CSSE, 2014). Although many African Americans and Hispanics are unprepared for college, White students who are equally unprepared nonetheless have opportunities to access postsecondary opportunities of higher quality and at higher rates (CSSE, 2014). In addition, students with more rigorous academic high school curricula tend to improve their academic performance and persistence in college.

Disparities in racial and ethnic achievement have extensive and far-reaching negative implications. For example, African American males do not reach the same level of achievement as African American females or White males, regardless of educational level (i.e., elementary, secondary, or postsecondary) (Hines et al., 2020). Consequently, African American males do not graduate from high school, attend college, or complete college at the same rates as their White peers. African American males in urban school districts are more likely to experience adverse outcomes such as academic failure, high dropout rates, low graduation rates, low test scores, low

grades and grade point averages, low representation in gifted and advanced placement classes, and greater participation in special education (Hines et al., 2020).

Negative academic performance among African American males in urban school systems translates into disparities in college attendance and graduation rates. For 18- to 24-year-olds, there are significant inequalities in college enrollment rates across racial and ethnic lines when one does not consider gender (McFarland et al., 2017; NCES, 2019). In 2015, Asians enrolled in college at rates of 63%, while Whites enrolled at 42%, Hispanics enrolled at 37%, and Blacks enrolled at 35%. When one considers gender, White males and females have college enrollment rates of 39% and 44%, respectively; African American males and females have college enrollment rates of 34% and 36%, respectively; and Hispanic males and females have college enrollment rates of 33% and 44%, respectively (McFarland et al., 2017; NCES, 2019).

Counselors play an essential role in students' college plans (ASCA, 2019; Hines et al., 2020). For example, they help students develop educational goals, provide students with information and knowledge about high school classes that can help them prepare for college or future careers, and identify current and postsecondary opportunities (i.e., college, vocational school, workforce, apprenticeships, military, scholarships). School counselors promote college and career preparedness by encouraging students to consider persons, traits, friends, sources of information, and other "natural" and readily available resources in their lives that could assist them in making career or college plans. School counselors play a role in increasing college enrollment and persistence rates by providing programs and services to all students to support their individual planning efforts and by addressing disparities that inhibit some students from effectively transitioning through high school into college (Hines et al., 2020). By understanding student college and career objectives and goals, school counselors will provide counseling,

consultation, and support services to students and their families to ensure that students are appropriately prepared for college planning and acceptance (ASCA, 2019).

One can measure academic integration by academic performance and intellectual development while in college (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012). Although both comprise structural and normative components, the former relates directly to the assembly of the specific, detailed requirements of the academic system. The latter pertains more to an individual's identification with the norms of an educational system. Elliot et al.'s (2018) study examines how minority males use their relationships to decide whether to attend college. The researchers intended to review the overall experiences of males of minority backgrounds instead of differentiating between the groups.

Once African American males have enrolled in college, the next challenge is retaining them until they graduate. It is critical to identify strategies to ensure that they persist, navigate their trajectories, and go beyond matriculation (Eliason & Turalba, 2019; Simmons, 2019). Scholars have suggested several strategies to support male African American college students' enrollment, retention, and graduation. For example, few of the participants had taken advanced placement courses in high school (Branch, 2017; Harper, 2012; Hill, 2017). Therefore, they were not as familiar with the academic expectations of college. Second, the study shows that family support was essential to ensuring participants enrolled and remained in college. Third, the study illustrates that self-motivation was critical. The participants had to want to earn a college degree for themselves. Fourth, and somewhat surprisingly, the participants wanted to continue graduate or professional school. Earning a bachelor's degree was their initial higher education goal. Fifth, the results showed that campus involvement with ethnic organizations was significant (Branch, 2017; Eliason & Turalba, 2019; Harper, 2012; Hill, 2017).

Campus Connections

Student engagement refers to a student's level of enthusiasm and interest in their learning experiences, meaning it relates to what institutions may do, such as alter teaching procedures, create programs like as first-year seminars, service-learning courses, learning communities, and so on (Lucas, 2018; Shappie & Debb, 2017). Student engagement, according to Shappie & Debb, has a multidimensional construct with three main components: behavioral (academic and social or extracurricular involvement), affective (affective reactions to teachers, peers, and the school), and cognitive (affective responses to teachers, peers, and the school) (investment and mental effort).

It is necessary to compare the African American male collegiate experience at PWIs with their experiences at HBCUs to gain a complete understanding. Brooms and Davis (2017) indicated that African American male students felt isolated based on race and gender. However, their study suggests that these students valued and sustained relationships with African American males regardless of the type of institution. Moreover, African American faculty enhanced their students' experiences and tried to ensure that they remained focused despite the challenges of being an African American male at a PWI (Simmons, 2019). There are various types of social interactions that manifest in the social system of the college. Evidence shows that peer-group associations are likely to be most closely related to students' levels of social integration (Tinto, 1975). Extracurricular activities and college interactions appear to be of equal secondary importance to students' commitment to their institution. At given degrees of academic goal commitment, students' institutional commitment relates to variants in dropout behavior (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Simmons, 2019; Tinto, 1975).

Four dominant themes are associated with African American men who successfully graduated from college. First, mentorship is essential and contributes to African American men's college persistence. For example, all participants in one recent study (Tolliver, III & Miller, 2018) indicated that academic, social, or emotional support encouraged them to remain in and graduate from college. Second, socialization is critical to ensure that students do not feel isolated. Participants in the aforementioned study who assimilated on-campus thought they could progress toward their degrees because they had the requisite support (Elliott et al., 2018; Tolliver, III & Miller, 2018). The third theme associated with African American men graduating from college is the presence of on-campus support services. Some participants in recent studies indicated the importance of campus services to promote engagement with other ethnically diverse students. Finally, family and community expectations motivate students to remain in and graduate from college (Elliott et al., 2018; Tolliver, III & Miller, 2018). These themes are significant and deserve attention as they shed light on the support that African American males require as they earn their undergraduate degrees.

Research continuously demonstrates differences in Black student engagement at PWIs and HBCUs (Boyras et al., 2016; Boyras & Granda, 2019; Elliott et al., 2018; Goings, 2018; Tolliver, III & Miller, 2018). HBCUs have provided generally positive social and psychological environments that foster enhanced student engagement for Black college students, although they are usually financially poorer than PWIs (Lucas, 2018). Unlike other universities, HBCUs create campus climates that are instructional inclusive and sensitive to Black students' cultures of origin and their needs and priorities (Shappie & Debb, 2017). Shappie & Debb point out that one seldom acknowledged factor is the positive impact that HBCUs' common mission of racial uplift has on Black student engagement.

At PWIs, Black students must endure challenges such as feeling isolated, marginalized, and excluded in their attempts to adjust to campus environments. Such challenges are primarily due to racist climates, low teacher expectations, being expected to represent all members of their racial/ethnic group, being excluded from study groups, and other racial microaggressions. Black students' experiences with racism on college campuses in the form of microaggression, cultural isolation, and avoidance have physiological, psychological, and behavioral consequences, which can have academic consequences (Brooks et al., 2020; Cokley et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2019). Moreover, racism is seldom isolated and can be found in universities, classrooms, and administration.

Mental Health and Persistence of African American Males

Stigmatized racial and ethnic populations and other socially marginalized groups report experiences of discrimination that are inversely related to good health (Williams et al., 2019). These experiences have been referred to as self-reported, perceived, and racial discrimination and these terms are interchangeable. Self-reports of discrimination can adversely affect health by triggering adverse emotional reactions that can lead to altered physiological responses and changes in health behaviors, increasing the risk of poor health. Perceived discrimination poses a threat to one's livelihood and is associated with malice, obstructing a person's optimal functioning, and undermining their quality of life. Discriminatory events are a common occurrence in the lives of African Americans, with reports that an individual may face one as frequently as once every two weeks.

According to several studies, Latinx Americans and Asian Americans also reported regular experiences of discrimination (Cokley et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2019). Brooks et al. (2020) examined whether perceived discrimination has been linked to the ability to commit

suicide in Black and White persons. According to their findings, more significant prejudice has been connected to increased symptoms of depression, suicidal thoughts, and non-discriminatory painful and provocative experiences (such as discharging a firearm, getting a tattoo, or skydiving) in both Black and White adults (Brooks et al.).

Perceived discrimination results in a psychological cost that many students may lack the resources to address (Cokely et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2019). Although everyone can suffer the effects of prejudice, discrimination is most prevalent among marginalized groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities. Racial and ethnic minorities are more prone to perceiving discrimination in collegial settings, particularly at PWIs. For example, research has shown that African Americans' perceptions of bias are racially motivated. In light of research that suggests a strong link between perceived discrimination and mental health outcomes, it is critical to account for the nuances of these experiences among students of color. Perceived discrimination has been linked to psychological discomfort (Brooks et al., 2020), low self-esteem, and low levels of life satisfaction (Smith et al., 2020). The most common signs of discomfort associated with perceived discrimination among racial and ethnic minorities are depression and anxiety (Brooks et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2019). Scholars have investigated the role ethnicity plays in mental health and its potential as a mediator between mental health and perceived prejudice (Cokley et al., 2017).

Minority stress is described as an emotional response to associating with a group that has been historically marginalized and indicates that racial minority students on predominantly White campuses may experience minority stress as a result of direct experiences with racism or discrimination, conflicts with cultural or social identities, and difficulties making meaningful connections with White students and professors, among other things (Clark & Mitchell, 2018).

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) (2016) suggests that African American students at PWIs are more stressed than White students because they are more likely to experience stress due to college mental and physical demands and anxiety related to their minority status. Stress has been linked to chronic physical diseases like hypertension and diabetes, and it can have significant health repercussions if it builds up over time (Clark & Mitchell, 2018; NIMH, 2016).

According to the NIMH (2016), cognitive stress symptoms are associated with melancholy and anxiety in terms of mental health. Despair, difficulties concentrating, sleeping issues, depression, worrying, and irritable mood are all psychological symptoms that can be detrimental to college students' daily functioning, intellectual development, and overall academic success. These signs and symptoms do not arise from a single stressful event; instead, when persons are exposed to chronic stress due to a succession of stressful situations, they are more likely to develop (Clark & Mitchell, 2018; NIMH, 2016).

Moreover, depressive symptomatology influences African American students' academic performance and college persistence (Boyras et al., 2016; Boyras & Granda, 2019; Lam & Zhou, 2020). In addition, many students' decisions to drop out occur during or near the end of their first year of college. Research indicates that rates of depression may be higher for African American college students who may have fewer resources to support their college experiences. There is a distinct difference in the mental health issues that African American students at PWIs and HBCUs face. African American students at a PWI reported they felt underrepresented, alienated, and isolated at their university, which led to feelings of frustration, being overlooked, and being misunderstood (Goings, 2018). In addition, African American students reported that race-related stressors (e.g., hostile reactions from staff, racial segregation on campus, and institutional

racism) and difficulty initiating interactions with faculty made them feel less supported academically (Cokely et al., 2017). On the other hand, African American students who attended HBCUs reported higher levels of academic involvement and more satisfaction with the ethnic and racial diversity of the faculty and the sense of community on their campuses than their peers who attended PWIs (Boyratz et al., 2016; Boyraz, & Granda, 2019; Goings, 2018; Koo & Yoon, 2021).

Educational and life events impact the ability of African American males to succeed at PWIs, whether they are of traditional college-age or are nontraditional students (Goings, 2018; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). As the literature shows on traditional students, African American male college students have similar academic and social experiences, concerns, and limitations (Boyratz et al., 2016; Boyraz & Granda, 2019). Depression is one life event that influences African American male college students. Nontraditional students are also concerned about social activities on campus or choose to pursue a career, which could delay their entry to college and cause them to drop out if they attend. Research indicates that African American college students may be at a higher risk of experiencing depression and may have fewer resources to support their college experiences (Boyratz et al., 2016; Boyraz & Granda, 2019; Cokely et al., 2017; Goings, 2018).

Documenting Success Rates and Experiences

In addition to ethnicity, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and first-generation college students have various reasons and motivations for attending college (Elliott et al., 2018; Tolliver, III & Miller, 2018). Although parents promoted the idea that college is significant, if not vital, for their children, the majority of participants reported receiving only superficial or minimal assistance from their parents during the search and selection process.

However, studies have revealed three significant, consistent findings for all students, regardless of ethnicity. First, parents act as the impetus for the children's college and career goals by providing encouragement and support. Unfortunately, while supportive of their children, the parents of many students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and first-generation college students have limited knowledge of colleges' search and selection processes. Finally, African American, and Latino males rely on older siblings and extended families for college application and enrollment assistance (Elliott et al., 2018; Tolliver, III & Miller, 2018).

There was considerable research on student persistence at PWIs, but little research on HBCUs. Some scholars have used Tinto's theoretical framework derived from work performed at PWIs to assess student persistence in residential HBCUs (Baker et al., 2019; Broady et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2017). In their study on residential HBCUs, Baker et al. (2019) found that the theories can be applied generally, and that social integration positively influenced institutional commitment, the primary predictor of student persistence. Several researchers (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Broomes, 2016; Boyraz et al., 2016; Harper, 2015; Hill; Hines et al., 2019 NCES, 2017) have addressed the plight and status of African American males along with each phase of the educational continuum. However, in addition to performing research, institutions must be more intentional about promoting and ensuring the success of African American males in society, secondary schools, and college.

Role of HBCUs

Historically, HBCUs have played a vital role in educating African Americans by preparing future leaders and providing higher education opportunities for first-generation African American college students (Baker et al., 2019; Broady et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2017; Preston & Palmer, 2018). The Morrill Act of 1862, which was extended to the southern Confederate

States and reinforced in 1890, paved the way for establishing what is now known as HBCUs. The Morrill Act set aside government land to fund land-grant universities in states (Killough et al., 2018). Many Whites, particularly in the South, supported establishing different institutions for Black and White students. Rather than allowing formerly enslaved people to enter White institutions, Whites wished to build separate institutions for the Negro, which were paid for by the government, to keep the races from mixing (Killough et al., 2018).

Moreover, the American Missionary Association; the U.S. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands; Negro churches; and individual White donors funded and supported newly established universities for Negroes (Killough et al., 2018). HBCUs grew and thrived for the next 100 years as a place of access and refuge for people who were shut out of other, primarily White, educational institutions. HBCUs have unquestionable relevance and significance throughout history (Baker et al., 2019; Broady et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2017; Killough et al., 2018; Preston & Palmer, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Most HBCUs are located in the Southern region of the United States, the area with the greatest concentration of African Americans (). HBCUs are a source of accomplishment and immense pride for the African American community and the entire nation (Baker et al., 2019; Broady et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2017; Preston & Palmer, 2018). The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, defines an HBCU as any postsecondary institution that was founded before 1964 and whose primary mission was and continues to be the education of Black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the United States Department of Education to be a reliable authority on the quality of training provided or is making reasonable progress toward accreditation, according to an acceptable accrediting agency (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Notably, HBCUs provide a student-centered environment that helps African American males succeed more than other demographics (e.g., African American women; Harper, 2012; Walker, 2018). Since African American males have been unable to achieve similar goals due to educational, economic, and societal constraints, HBCUs like Morehouse College aim to help first-generation Black male college students from low- to moderate-income families achieve despite various obstacles like greater imprisonment and unemployment rates. HBCUs encourage young African American men to realize their potential by offering students opportunities to build strong ties with administrators, peers, and teachers. Because of HBCUs' student-centered attitudes, some academics have suggested that African American males from diverse backgrounds may outperform societal expectations at these institutions (Harper, 2012; Walker, 2018).

In Goings' (2016) study, the author found that an HBCU explicitly recognized nontraditional African American males' identities as men and unconventional students. This distinction was crucial to their success; these students met professors and staff members at the HBCU interested in learning about their personal experiences; offered encouraging words and reached out to these males outside of classroom settings to ensure that they could balance their life, work, and academic responsibilities (Going). Like those at other postsecondary institutions, students at HBCUs must have access to programs to help them achieve academically and mentally (Clark & Mitchell, 2018; NIMH, 2016). Focusing on Black males' emotional wellness is crucial given the environmental challenges before, during, and after graduation, including racism.

Even though HBCUs are more likely than other schools to recruit students who face various financial, emotional, and societal challenges, they provide students with critical skills for

survival in modern society (Baker et al., 2019; Broady et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2017; Killough et al., 2018; Preston & Palmer, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These institutions teach African American males how to navigate monolithic workplaces, overcome preconceptions and misconceptions, satisfy academic standards, and maintain a strong cultural identity (Harper, 2012; Walker, 2018). Since 2016, the number of students enrolled in HBCUs has grown (Williams & Palmer, 2019). The racism that was once subtle has resurfaced in many communities around the country, as well as on college campuses (Garibay et al., 2020; Harris, 2018; Pratt, 2016; Smith, 2017).

According to Villarreal (2020), hate crimes have increased to their most significant level in 28 years. According to university officials and professors, many White Americans were unapologetic in their displays of racism, which has fueled an upsurge in racial assaults against minoritized students at PWIs (Garibay et al., 2020; Harris, 2018; Kimbrough, 2016; Smith, 2017). Between 2016 and 2018, news outlets reported that HBCUs saw an enrollment resurgence, with several Black universities enjoying record-breaking application and enrolment figures from Black students (Harris, 2018; Smith, 2017). Higher education experts believe that more Black students are enrolling at HBCUs as a result of these trends.

Research (Harris, 2018; Smith, 2017; Williams & Palmer, 2019) shows that the United States' racial climate in the 21st century reflects a growing sense of pessimism about race relations, an increased public awareness, and concerns about police brutality toward people of color and increased empirical proof of the country's implicit anti-Black racial bias. This climate also reflects racial justice and anti-Blackness movements' growing strength, such as Black Lives Matter (Mwamgi et al., 2018). In Williams et al.'s (2021) study on students' experiences at HBCUs, participants discussed how their identities and cultures had influenced their desire to

attend an HBCU for tertiary education. In addition, most indicated that they mentioned wanted a break from the stigma of being "Black" by finding a venue where they would be in the majority, at least for a short time, despite their college ages. The authors also found that students attending an HBCU indicated that they desired a secure space to learn about and celebrate Black culture and that HBCUs offer such an environment (Williams et al.).

Since the 1800s, students who have attended HBCUs have thrived because they built bonds that endured despite societal barriers (Walker, 2018; Walker & Goings, 2017). By creating a sense of community, HBCUs allow male students to connect with peers and mentors after they enroll critically (Preston & Palmer, 2018; Walker & Goings, 2017). Various scholars (Baker et al., 2019; Broady et al., 2017; Shappie & Debb, 2019; Walker, 2018) have concluded that HBCUs' student-centered philosophy gives African American males from disparate backgrounds the skills they need to exceed societal expectations.

For example, Morehouse College encourages first-generation Black male college students from low- to moderate-income backgrounds to succeed despite various societal limitations and barriers (Walker, 2018; Walker & Goings, 2017). Students of color who attend HBCUs may benefit from a more positive racial climate on campus. This has been demonstrated to significantly improve the minority student experience in higher education (Preston & Palmer, 2018; Shappie & Debb, 2019; Walker, 2018). It is reasonable to assume that HBCUs will better serve their students by developing naturally more inclusive environments and being sensitive to psychological needs and cultural backgrounds. As a result, HBCUs allow African American students to be part of the majority at their institutions while they receive a high-quality education. Those students' experiences and level of engagement are incredibly different from their African American peers attending PWIs, where the majority culture is favored (Baker et al.,

2019; Broady et al., 2017). On the other hand, African American students at HBCUs may not need to devote the nonacademic effort required to attain equivalent academic achievement.

Despite this, only a limited amount of research has been conducted on the relationship between HBCU students' participation and achievement (Baker et al., 2020; 2021; Goings, 2016; 2018; Harper, 2012; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Preston & Palmer, 2018; Shappie & Debb, 2019).

Summary

To understand the existing research on factors that contribute to the retention of African American males in higher education, one must first establish the appropriate theoretical framework. The literature review in Chapter Two achieved the goal by reviewing Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2012) student integration model or persistence theory. Tinto distinguished between voluntary exit, in which a student may transfer to another institution and still graduate from college, and forced exit (dismissal), in which a student is less likely to graduate from college (Choi et al., 2019; Simmons, 2017, 2019). Although Tinto's theory was developed for college students, data on student retention support the departure criteria that Tinto's theory includes. In addition, students with academic difficulties are more likely to drop out or be dismissed. Tinto's model also claimed that students' backgrounds influence their original goals for attending college and their academic and social relationships once there (Choi et al., 2019; Simmons, 2017, 2019). Tinto's student integration model or persistence theory provided the contextual framework for research on factors contributing to African American males' persistence in higher education. African American males' historical and educational experiences significantly affect their college attendance, retention, and graduation rates; there is significant discussion of this topic in the literature. However, according to Baker et al. (2020, 2021), relevant HBCU literature is limited; the only HBCU-specific theoretical work relating to student achievement and HBCUs is Arroyo

and Gasman (2014). According to Arroyo and Gasman, HBCUs provide students with a unique, supportive environment with a qualitatively different or atypical experience than PWIs, improving overall student performance.

Consequently, if we assume persistence is implied in holistic student success, we might also state theoretically that student persistence at HBCUs is influenced or moderated by the supportive environment. Arroyo and Gasman (2014,) also conceptualized three distinctive influences on holistic student success: improved achievement (Commodore et al., 2018), identity formation (Gasman & Arroyo, 2019; Preston & Palmer, 2018), and values cultivation (Gasman & Arroyo). These are designed to function together and independently to assist students in developing and achieving higher levels of achievement. Assume that perseverance is influenced by student success, identity construction, and value nurturing. In this context, we could hypothesize that HBCUs' unique student development process promotes student persistence. Baker et al. (2020; 2021) propose an institution-centric conceptual model based on research conducted at HBCUs and interviews with HBCU students but do not assess their theory. Additional research on students' experiences at HBCUs is needed, particularly at the nation's only higher education institution dedicated to the persistence of African American males. Literature on related topics also explains that African American males' historical and educational experiences cannot be minimized, as these experiences are a significant factor that influences the persistence of African American males in college (Baker et al., 2020; 2021; Goings, 2016; 2018; Harper, 2012; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Preston & Palmer, 2018; Shappie & Debb, 2019). Although higher education institutions have consistently implemented strategies to recruit and help students of diverse backgrounds, research also has addressed college preparedness and strategies to improve their success, persistence, and graduation graduate (Black & Bimper,

2020). By identifying factors that contribute to African American male students' satisfaction and willingness to return to HBCUs, including liberal arts colleges, this qualitative, phenomenological study bridges the gap relating to the disparities African American males in higher education face from the viewpoint of successful African American males (Black & Bimper, 2020; Harper, 2012; Preston & Palmer, 2018).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Chapter Three presented the procedures, research design, and analysis for this research study. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the persistence experience of African American male students at a historically Black college or university (HBCUs) based on the individual living experiences of African American male students enrolled at a historically Black, liberal arts college. Applying a phenomenological research method in this study was essential because it made it possible to obtain information about the participants' prior experiences with pre-enrollment and educational assistance and their social experiences while enrolling in and attending college (Simon & Goes, 2011). Chapter Three contained several sections: research design, research questions, setting and participants, researcher positionality, interpretative framework, philosophical assumptions, researcher's role, procedures, data collection plan, trustworthiness, and summary.

Research Design

This study on the persistence of African American males at an all-male HBCU was designed to explain the essence of the experience for these students who continue to persist toward their bachelor's degrees. A qualitative study was critical, and a phenomenological design was appropriate because the participants' prior experiences with pre-enrollment, educational assistance, and social experiences while enrolling in and attending college were obtained (Adom et al., 2018). Because qualitative research was process-based, narrated, and storied, it was uniquely positioned to provide researchers with more closely related data to the human experience (Stahl & King, 2020). Therefore, it was imperative that the participants trust both the researcher and the research. Consequently, building trust was crucial in qualitative studies

(Neubauer et al., 2019; Stahl & King, 2020). Qualitative research was critical if one wished to understand complicated problems and topics about which little research had been performed, which can help explain underlying issues (Rust et al., 2017).

Transcendental Phenomenological Qualitative Study

Moustakas (1994) suggested that research should focus on the wholeness of a person's experiences and the essence of those experiences. Moustakas focused primarily on the unique "transcendental phenomenological imaginative, and prescient" approach of Edmund Husserl, a Stanford professor who suggested that only by suspending the "natural attitude" could philosophy serve as its own distinctive and rigorous science (Beyer, 2016; Neubauer et al., 2019, p.33). Husserl indicated that phenomenology was a science of consciousness rather than empirical evidence, encouraging the researcher to synthesize textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon under study (Beyer, 2016; Neubauer et al., 2019).

The phenomenological research method included four components: descriptive, reduction, essence, and intentionality. According to Moustakas (1994), the first goal of *description* in empirical phenomenological research was to "determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and can provide a comprehensive description of it" (p.13). The second goal was *reduction*. The phenomenological reduction method aided the researcher in this endeavor by encouraging the researcher to have an open mind and listen attentively to participants' accounts of the phenomena under investigation (Moustakas). Moustakas's epoché was based on Husserl's reflection on the Greek word epoché, which means to abstain. The third component of the phenomenological research method was the *essence*, which was the core meaning of individuals' experiences in certain phenomena. Free imagination, intuition, and reflection were used to determine whether a particular characteristic was an

essential essence. Taking a transcendental approach meant keeping an open mind about obtaining additional information based on the essence of participants' experiences. Finally, the last component was *intentionality*. Phenomenology relied on two concepts, *noesis* and *noema*, to express intentionality. Intentionality refers to the correlation between noema (i.e., phenomenon) and noesis (i.e., meaning) that directs one's interpretation of the experience under study (Moustakas).

Researchers emphasized the need to select and justify proper methodological frameworks in research to ensure that data was collected and analyzed correctly. In this study, Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological research method was essential because it involved gathering information about the participants' prior social, pre-enrollment, and educational assistance experiences while enrolling in and attending college; I used a purposeful sampling approach to recruit participants and develop a structured interview protocol and interview questions based on prior research studies (Tolliver & Miller, 2018). This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to understand the persistent experiences of African American male students at a historically Black college. This issue was built on and elaborated on previous research using Moustakas' research design, which was necessary to illustrate the magnitude of the problem. Moustakas viewed experience and behavior as an integrated and inseparable relationship between a phenomenon and the person experiencing the phenomenon (Beyer, 2016; Neubauer et al., 2019; Simon & Goes, 2011).

After organizing and analyzing the data, I summarized the entire study, distinguished current findings from prior research, suggested opportunities for further investigation and discussed the results in terms of social meanings and personal and expert values (Moustakas, 1994). My research expanded upon Tolliver and Miller's study. Each participant reviewed their

transcript from the semi-structured interviews and focused groups for accuracy to strengthen the credibility of the transcripts. In addition, participants' exact words were used in code identification. Each participant reviewed their transcript from the semi-structured interviews and focused groups for accuracy to strengthen the credibility of the transcripts. In addition, participants' exact words were used in code identification.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What were the persistent experiences of African American males enrolled at a historically Black liberal arts college?

Sub-Question One

What personal reasons contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants attending an HBCU?

Sub-Question Two

What social experiences contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants attending an HBCU?

Sub-Question Three

What institutional experiences contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants attending an HBCU?

Setting and Participants

According to Creswell (2018), researchers should purposefully select a site and participants to ensure that the researcher understands the problem and the research question. In this study, I chose King College (pseudonym) because it is a unique institution directly relevant

to the phenomenon under study. The characteristics of the site and the participants are described below.

Site

Located on a 66-acre tract in a major city, King College is a historically Black institution with an undergraduate enrollment of more than 2,200 students (King, 2021). The college is ranked in the 2022 edition of the National Best Liberal Arts Colleges publication (U.S. News, 2021). King College has a selective admission process, with an acceptance rate of 51% (NCES, 2021; U.S. News, 2021). The student-faculty ratio at King College is 13:1, and 44.8% of the institution's classes have fewer than 20 students. The most popular majors at King College include business, management, marketing, biological, biomedical sciences, English and literature/letters, political science and government, and sociology (NCES, 2021; U.S. News, 2021). The average first-year retention rate, an indicator of student satisfaction, is 80%, while the four-year graduation rate is 33% (NCES, 2021).

In terms of organization, these are the major units: Academic Affairs; Admissions; Business and Finance; Data, Analytics, Institutional Research, and Effectiveness; External Relations and Alumni Engagement; Institutional Advancement; Marketing and Communications; Registrar; Research and Sponsored Programs; Student Services; and Title III (King, 2021). The services these organizational units provide are designed to support students' enrollment, retention, and graduation. King College is an appropriate site for this study because there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the persistence of African American males at the nation's only college founded specifically for their higher educational attainment.

Participants

King College has a total undergraduate enrollment of 2,238, with a gender distribution of 100% male and zero female students (NCES, 2021). At King College, 83% of full-time undergraduates receive need-based financial aid. In addition, King College offers several student services, including nonremedial tutoring, placement services, health services, and health insurance. Additionally, 66% of King College students reside in campus housing, and the institution is part of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II. Of the nearly 2,300 students enrolled at King College, 97% are full-time students 24 years or younger. The college reported that 72% of its students are African American but did not report the race/ethnicity of 24% of its students. However, only 2% of its students are of two or more races, and there is one foreign exchange student. King College did not report the presence of any American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian, or White students (NCES, 2021). The college boasted an 83% fall-to-fall retention rate among first-time, first-year students.

Purposive sampling was a method of discovering and selecting participants who were most likely to provide quality and valuable information (Campbell et al., 2020). In purposive sampling, particular types of participants were included in the final sample of a research project. The rationale for using a purposive technique was to select participants based on a study's goals and objectives; people of varying backgrounds may have diverse and important perspectives on the ideas and topics in question and thus must be included. According to Creswell (2018), sample size depends on the qualitative design approach. In this study, only male students who identified as African American and actively working toward completing a bachelor's degree were selected for the study to ensure the information gathered accurately captured the phenomenon.

With regard to phenomenology, the sample size ranges from 3 to 15 people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Twelve participants were chosen for this study. The participants differed in

classification, age, major, and family status. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to protect their identities, and each participant was assigned a Greek letter name. The study also included a description of the participants and their demographic data.

Researcher Positionality

My primary motivation for this study was based on the desire to highlight the importance of assisting students with making informed college decisions, my lived experiences of making such an important decision without appropriate guidance, and my passion for the plight of African American males in this country, as a mother. Although my parents were college-trained, and I took college preparatory courses in high school, I did not receive the appropriate guidance from my parents or school counseling to make an informed college decision. My collegiate experience was at two predominantly White institutions (PWIs): one liberal arts college and one research university. I was unprepared for the isolation and exclusion I experienced in college, especially at the smaller liberal arts institution, 1,000 miles away from home. So, I transferred after completing 60 credit hours. During my exit interview, my advisor told me that I would more than likely not graduate from college if I transferred, and even if I did, I would not complete my degree in four years. Fueled by this disparaging remark, I completed my undergraduate degree in less than four years and have spent my entire career helping young people identify the best postsecondary options for them, especially transfer students.

In addition, this topic is important to me because my son is a graduate of King's College but experienced feelings of isolation as a transfer student. Although he persevered, countless other African American young men also deserved the opportunity but did not receive it. On the other hand, my daughter could be a model for academic and social integration rooted in high school preparedness and informed college decision-making. My lived experiences are

comparable to both children, though each had unique experiences that they created for themselves.

Interpretive Framework

This research aimed to construct knowledge rather than reproduce facts from the lived experiences of African American males enrolled in the nation's only postsecondary institution established for the expressed purpose of providing educational opportunities for African American males. Constructivism allowed me to build on these students' previous knowledge and experiences by putting their knowledge into practice (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Constructivism made me an active participant in the learning process rather than a passive receiver of information, strengthening the study. Since constructivism appeals to a natural curiosity about the world and how things work, I chose this framework to engage participants by putting their prior knowledge and lived experiences to use. Therefore, I was able to construct their realities based on how they perceived their institution's commitment to their college participation and the outcomes of college participation (Wilson et al., 2013). From a constructivist perspective, values and ethics are essential everyday problems (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Constructivism acknowledges the active role social context and practitioner values play in creating client descriptions and problems (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used the students' lived experiences to provide the basis for my findings and conclusions.

I selected this design to remove myself from the focus instead rely on the participants' stories to gain a new perspective on the phenomenon, which was accomplished by accepting my own experiences before starting the research (Creswell, 2018). According to Moustakas (1994), epoché was a difficult concept to grasp because it impacts one's own experiences, emotions, and thoughts. Before conducting any interviews, I reviewed the questions and focused solely on the

participant without infusing my biases or experiences. In addition, I did not tell any of the participants about my or my children's experiences. This allowed me to begin the process of bracketing and continue to do so throughout the data collecting and analysis.

Philosophical Assumptions

According to Allen (2008), constructivism emphasizes the active involvement of social context and practitioner values in shaping descriptions and issues and demands accountability and collaboration. The constructivist worldview encouraged people to reconsider the significance of their principles and make social justice a reality (Allen, 2008). The constructivist paradigm assumed relativist ontology (i.e., there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (i.e., a knower and respondent cocreate understandings), and a naturalistic (i.e., in the natural world) set of methodological procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.24).

Ontological Assumption

Ontology was a philosophical theory of existence concerned with reality and human beings (Lee, 2012). Ontology suggested multiple realities. One could interpret ontology's multiple realities in two ways. First, there was the "one reality" interpretation; put, there was one reality, and we live in it; second, there were multiple realities, not merely categories of one reality (Lee, 2012, p. 407). Although people have different interpretations of reality, Christians believe that there is one reality: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ" (New International Version, 2011, Colossians 2:8). With respect to my research, I believed in the same reality as the participants because of our shared culture. I used students' lived experiences and perspectives to identify common themes among the participants (Creswell, 2018).

Epistemological Assumption

With respect to the epistemological assumption, the researcher's goal was to collect data from participants while maintaining a sufficient distance between my opinions and reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This assumption allowed one to use the participants' quotes as evidence. The epistemological assumption validated the themes I was able to draw from the observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Part of the context of the relationship between myself as the researcher and those I researched is our shared African Americans collegiate experiences and our African American heritage. Though I attended PWIs, I worked at several HBCUs and primarily Black institutions (PBIs). I have spent my career assisting students with making informed decisions about college and remaining in college. I understand and have lived through the advice and gaps from parents and other family members who are misinformed. Qualitative researchers must be sensitive to the complexities of archiving and reusing data but maintain their ethical responsibilities to the participants (Feldman & Shaw, 2019).

Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumptions refer to how a researcher's attitudes and beliefs influence the scientific process and how the researcher responds to the findings of their investigation (Lincoln et al., 2013). As a result, a researcher's emotions, expectations, and ideals must not affect the participants or the outcome of the research process. As an African American woman, I have experienced racism as a professional and student, and however, I have been fortunate enough to have been able to excel despite setbacks. Also, as a mother of a graduate of King College, I know how his lived experiences impacted his institutional experience and influenced his current station in life. Consequently, bracketing was crucial. These students' quests to challenge the status quo and achieve equity in African American male educational performance relied heavily

on my reporting of their lived experiences as a researcher.

Researcher's Role

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the concept of the human being as a research instrument to emphasize the uniqueness of the researcher's involvement in the scientific inquiry process. This process was unique because only humans can create and add significance to the world due to their attributes of sensitivity, responsiveness, and flexibility (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2015). In a study on the dynamics between female researchers engaged in qualitative research with male participants and the implications of those dynamics, Lefkowich (2018) indicated that researchers should be mindful of how gender preconceptions can inadvertently influence where, how, and with whom research is conducted.

I took the following steps to ensure that the conversations with participants remained professional and ethical and focused on the research questions: ethical communication has to be accurate. Although there are various basic principles of ethical communication, honesty is the foundation. However, emotional intelligence or empathy is required to understand and communicate effectively with others. Within the context of ethical communication, emotional intelligence allows me to comprehend the needs of others and respond to them as efficiently as possible as if I were in their shoes. First, as a researcher, I communicated honestly without intent to deceive or present only parts of the truth, meaning only the facts will be given to the listener. I did not lie to any of the participants for any reason. Second, I was an active listener and asked questions for clarification instead of integrating my opinions and biases. Third, I spoke in a non-judgmental manner, avoiding any conflict or misunderstandings with the participants. Fourth, I did not interrupt any participants while talking to ensure that they felt valued and respected.

Finally, I respected their privacy and confidentiality and avoided inserting myself into their personal lives.

Procedures

Most of the procedures of this study centered around the students' participation in interviews and focus groups. However, I scheduled meetings with appropriate college administrators to identify appropriate students as study participants. Engaging with college administrators in selecting participants improves the researcher's transparency and participants' trust in the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, this study strictly adhered to Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures to ensure the protection of the student participants. The data will be maintained for five years and stored in a secured fire-resisted lockbox in my attic

Permissions

After my proposal was approved, I sought IRB permission from Liberty University (Appendix A). Before I began my research, I obtained all necessary approvals and consent, and I did not start any research until I obtained approval from my chair and the IRB. In addition, after my research had been authorized, I developed a contact list and coordinated with the college administration to choose potential candidates. Preliminary interviews with the selected students were conducted to determine if they were suitable candidates (Appendix B). Interviews were conducted via Zoom or Teams at the students' convenience. They were informed that participation in the study was completely voluntary. I ensured that I updated my chair about the procedure throughout the selection process.

Recruitment Plan

The participants for this study were selected based on referrals from the Vice President for External Relations and Alumni Engagement (Appendix C). For phenomenological studies, Creswell (2018) recommended a sample of 5–24 participants for interviews. I used purposive sampling to identify 15 students for the semi-structured interviews. These same students also participated in focus groups. Ellis (2016) indicated that focus groups should include six to eight interviewees. The participants were diverse, including their ages, classifications, first-generation, transfer, and socio-economic status. The Director of DIRE also provided a list of other staff who could provide contact information for students who might have wanted to participate. A cross-section of students was selected based on their classifications and participation in campus activities.

Data Collection Plan

Moustakas (1994) described two methods of data analysis: modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen and modified van Kaam method. The modified van Kaam method was more appropriate for my study because I bracketed myself out of the research. There were seven steps to the modified Van Kaam analysis: listing and grouping, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing, validation, individual textual description, individual structural description, and textural-structural description (Moustakas). First, I completed preliminary coding and grouping all pertinent quotes (horizontalization). Each quote contributed equally to the research. Second, I determined the experience's invariant components (reduction and elimination). Each quote went through a two-step procedure. Can this quote be reduced to its underlying meaning? Is this quote essential to the participant's lived experience of the phenomenon? Both questions must be answered affirmatively, or the quote will be removed.

Steps three and four involved grouping the themes that passed the two-question test to investigate the hidden meanings (clustering and thematizing). Following the generation of my themes, I compared them to the transcripts to ensure that they appropriately represent the participants' experiences and aid in telling their stories (validation). Next, for steps five and six, I created individual textural descriptions for each participant to use verbatim excerpts and quotes. I also created individual structural descriptions to examine the emotional, social, and cultural connections between what participants say. Primary data interpretation started at this phase. Step seven was a synthesis of lived experiences of the participants. The survey responses were reviewed and analyzed to create a final *composite structural-textural description* (Moustakas, 1994).

Information was obtained from individuals and groups through surveys. The primary purpose of survey research was to obtain the requisite descriptive details on participants' lived experiences. Targeted questions were asked students to obtain information related to their experiences using Survey Monkey, a valid and reliable tool. Individual interviews, demographic surveys, and focus group surveys were conducted. Students were chosen based on their demographic traits. Participants for personal interviews and focus groups were selected based on the recommendations from college personnel and the demographic survey.

I obtained approval from the IRB at Liberty University before I began data collection. Data was collected using a demographic survey to determine if participants met the research study criteria. Participants were contacted to participate in the study via an email invitation to obtain informed consent, and consent forms were obtained from all participants (Appendix D). I used semi-structured interviews and focus groups on collecting data from participants. Lastly, I used homogeneous sampling for focus groups and scheduled the semi-structured interviews and

focus groups. Once I identified and synthesized the themes from the semi-structured interviews and focus groups, I reviewed and analyzed the most recent institutional senior survey. I compared the themes identified in the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Responses were vetted with participants before I reviewed and assessed the findings. I continuously updated my chair during each phase to make necessary modifications to my research. Once the results were finalized, I reported the findings to my dissertation committee. I acknowledged all participants' and campus administrators' participation in my study.

Individual Interviews

All participants completed an introductory demographic survey to determine their classification and first-generation status. Although college personnel assisted in selecting a pool of potential participants, preliminary, demographic-type surveys were used to make the final selection of participants for the semi-structured interviews and focus groups to ensure that they included a cross-section of the population. Semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data collection (Appendix E). Interviews, not surveys, are the major mode of data collecting in qualitative research (Milacci & Zabolski, 2021). However, these same students were asked to participate in the focus groups, which ranged from 60–90 minutes, with each group varying in size from five to six students. Interviews were pre-arranged on specific days and times at an undisclosed location at King College. Interviews were conducted via Zoom or Teams and were scheduled for 60 minutes, depending on the students' access. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. According to Nusbaum et al. (2017), completing a memorandum after an interview helps document potential insights related to the participants' responses and interview procedures. The questions used for the semi-structured interviews were set out below (Appendix F).

Individual Interview Questions

College selection

1. Would you please introduce yourself?
2. What are the three main factors that contributed to your decision to enroll in college?

CRQ

3. What are the three main factors that contributed to your selection of King College? *CRQ*

Questions in the *College Selection* category are based on Harper's (2012) research on African American males in college, which details the four reasons why students enroll in college: academic preparedness for family support; self-motivation; plans after completing their bachelor's degrees; campus involvement (Brooms, 2017, 2018; Clark & Brooms, 2018; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012).

College engagement

4. How have you connected with faculty, staff, and other students? *SQ3*
5. What role have student activities played in your decision to remain enrolled at King? *SQ3*
6. How has your participation in student activities and organizations influenced your decision to remain enrolled? *SQ3*

Research indicated that student engagement (*College Engagement* questions) affected college engagement institutional attrition rates. Educational and life events affected African American males' ability to succeed at PWIs, whether traditional college-age or nontraditional students (Boyras et al., 2016; Goings, 2018). For example, depression influenced the academic performance and persistence of African American male college students. The literature showed that African American male college students at traditional college-age have similar educational and social experiences, concerns, and limitations (Boyras et al., 2016; Goings, 2018).

General reflection on college experience

7. What are the top three reasons you have chosen to stay at King College? *SQ1*
8. How would you describe your academic and social success at King College? *SQ1*

The questions about the participants' *general college experiences* were influenced by students' motivations to attend college. In addition to ethnicity, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and first-generation college students had distinct reasons and motivations behind their decisions to attend college (Elliott et al., 2018; Simmons, 2019).

Reflection on college experience as an African American male

9. How can academic and social success for African American male students be improved at King College? *CRQ*
10. What forms of communication would be most effective to ensure the participation of students in campus activities? *SQ2*

The *Reflections as an African American male* questions were based on the research that focused on minority males' overall experiences since academic disparities persist between African American males and their gender and ethnic counterparts (Elliott et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Once an African American male enrolled in college –noting that their enrollment was low compared to other groups – the next challenge institutions faced was retaining them until graduation. It was critical to identify strategies to ensure that they persisted, navigated their trajectories, and proceeded beyond matriculation (Elliott et al., 2018; Simmons, 2019). Therefore, the participants' reflective responses to their college experiences as African American males validated the literature.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Thematic analysis, based on a descriptive phenomenological approach, begins with the raw data, and progresses to identifying meanings, their organization into patterns, and the writing of themes connected to the study's research question (King & Brooks, 2021). In a phenomenological study, the researchers' primary purpose during the data analysis process was to derive meaning from the themes revealed during initial manual coding. This process included six vital steps for any phenomenological approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; King & Brooks, 2021; Saldaña, 2013; 2021). These were the steps that I used.

Step One: Transcriptions

The first step after data collection was to transcribe the semi-structured interviews. All interviews were transcribed using either Zoom or Teams. Each participant had an opportunity to review his transcript for member checking.

Step 2: Organizing the Data After transcription

To make sense of the large amounts of rich text, I focused on data organization to create the tale by reading and comprehending the transcripts/datasets. The coding of the dataset was the first step in this procedure.

Step 3: Coding

Coding was a method of organizing and comprehending data in a systematic manner (King & Brooks, 2021). The essential pieces of labeling and arranging the dataset were codes, and they were necessary for connecting the data and synthesizing it into categories. Hard or soft copies of the data were used for manual coding. I used manual coding to annotate transcripts with comments and highlights to discover recurring topics. This assisted me with finding the links between issues and constructing first- and second-level codes.

I manually coded them by circling, highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring rich or significant quotes. Highlighting cognitive and emotional feelings was one type of coding. Coding organized, filtered, highlighted, and focused on the data's most essential qualities. A single word, a complete phrase, or an entire page of text can be coded in the first cycle. It was a straightforward method of manually coding data based on seven subcategories of features such as grammatical, elemental, emotive, literacy and language, exploratory, procedural, and themes. The linked dataset contained instances of first-level coding.

Second cycle coding procedures, in which the portions coded were the same as in the first cycle, and even a reorganization of the codes created thus far, as shown below. In other words, the researcher must utilize their analytical skills to classify, prioritize, integrate, synthesize, abstract, conceptualize, and create a theory in the second cycle of coding (Saldaña, 2013, p. 45). Patterned, concentrated, axial, theoretical, elaborated, and longitudinal coding are the six types of second cycle coding described in Saldaña's 2021 manual.

Coding may not always be correct the first time, and as a result, recoding can occur with a more balanced viewpoint. Using memos while organizing data allowed the researcher to track their thoughts and decision-making process. Here's an example of how to use memos.

Step 4: Deducing Categories

After recognizing the codes, I categorized them (Saldaña, 2021). Data were coded and organized depending on what participants said and the memos I made as I read the transcript/dataset. Things were grouped not just because they are similar but also because they have some characteristics.

Step 5: Identifying Common Themes and Making Interpretations

I deduced interpretations based on the common patterns or themes observed and related them to the larger picture or objective of the study at this stage of the phenomenological data analysis process. In other words, I created a screenplay based on the common motifs found in the dataset. I connected them to determine the meaning that participants attach to the phenomenon - in this case, cultural immersion. One of the recurring motifs noticed by researchers in their cultural immersion phenomenological investigation is "culture shock." Both dataset participants reported experiencing culture shock due to the immersion experience, which they described as "eye-opening" and facilitating "personal growth via self-awareness" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 47).

Step 6: Maintaining a Reflective Journal

This was a crucial step in the qualitative data analysis process, particularly when doing a phenomenological study because it addressed researcher bias while also establishing acceptable transferability and credibility metrics. According to King & Brooks (2021), a reflective notebook or diary kept throughout the qualitative study analyzed the researcher's choices and decision-making process. It helped to re-examine the choices made or themes found for reconsideration. Journaling, in effect, served as an audit trail for the researchers and allowed them to keep their ideas and decisions clear, consistent, and straightforward. As a result, it was critical in the qualitative data processing process.

As the interviewer, I practiced the first stage of bracketing that corresponds to epoché by focusing on suspending judgment to understand the participants' accounts of their lived experiences (Dorfler & Stierand, 2020; Moustakas, 1994). I implemented this type of bracketing stage during data collection and data analysis. By bracketing out pre-understandings, beliefs, and values, I remained impartial and listened to the participants effectively. The second instance of

bracketing occurred in the data collection phase. As I prepared the notes, I identified and recalled any bracketing I missed during the interview. Finally, once I began the analysis, I engaged in the third phase of bracketing, which involved analyzing and processing the valuable data I collected (Dorfler & Stierand, 2020; Moustakas, 1994). The first step involved examining the participants' transcripts and clustering them into themes based on the commonalities between their responses. Bracketing enabled the objective analysis of the phenomenon. Second, I completed incorporating the results into a comprehensive description of the phenomenon. Finally, some participants were interviewed a second time to validate the data and vet the accuracy of their responses (Lincoln & Gupta, 1985; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The initial phase was to conduct semi-structured interviews to determine the depth of each participant's experience at the selected college site. Moustakas (1994) modified Van Kaam's interview analysis approach to analyze each semi-structured interview transcript. Each transcript was extracted for meaningful and descriptive statements about their students' experiences and grouped to generate themes (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas). In addition, these themes were categorized into a textural description that emphasized the "what" of their experience or a structural description that emphasizes the "how" of the experience (Moustakas, pp. 120–121).

I combined the textural and structural descriptions to create a textural-structural description that captures the essence of the participant's experience. This procedure was repeated for each participant, culminating in a "complete textural-structural description" of the student's experience, contributing to their persistence in college (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). Validation improved by employing member checking prior to constructing the composite textural-structural description to get insight into the accuracy and relevance of the themes that arose in each

textural-structural description (Creswell, 2013). In this stage, Epoché was used to revisit any biases and assess how they influenced final interpretations.

Recorded interviews were documented and reported using a three-pronged approach. First, I used an open-coding technique (Appendix I) to analyze each line to identify common themes in the data. Second, I organized data gathered from the participants. Their comments on the transcripts were used to categorize the findings and convert them into themes for analysis of the results. Finally, quotes from focus groups were used to enhance the participants' individual experiences. Common themes were vetted with participants for accuracy, called member checking. Lincoln and Guba (1986) described member checking as continuous, informal testing of information by solidifying responses of respondents to the investigator's reconstruction of what they have been told or otherwise discovered, as well as to the constructions offered by other respondents or sources, and final, formal testing of the last care report with a representative sample of stakeholders. Memoing (Appendix H) was used to vet common themes with the participants for accuracy.

Focus Groups

The phenomenological focus group highlighted how focus group participants could draw on and share their own unique, lived experiences and demonstrate how to use participants' individual experiences to understand the phenomenon better (Moustakas, 1994). Focus groups enhanced rather than compromised phenomenological research. Individual experiences were at the center of phenomenological research, and the analytical focus is on the individual participant's subjective, distinctive perceptions (Moustakas, 1994). However, individual reports did not have to be sought from a single participant by a single researcher. The individual perspective could still be preserved in a group context (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2019). Interviews

included a group of participants who allowed each to tell their story with minimal interruptions (Todd, 2019). Then other group members added valuable perspectives as the story unfolds, probing for more information and adding their insights related to shared meanings. Based on the literature, it was essential in a phenomenological focus group that each participant have the opportunity to hear their story. The researcher must be adept when dealing with two types of participants: overbearing and unassertive (Baillie, 2019). As a result, I ensured that the more soft-spoken participants were heard, and the dominant personalities provided equal opportunities (Winke, 2017).

Focus Group Questions

The focus groups allowed the researcher to gather additional data from multiple students on their satisfaction with King College and the factors that had influenced their intent to return to the college. The following questions were used for the focus groups:

1. What specific experiences at King College contributed to your success? *CRQ*
2. What are some of the advantages of attending King College? *CRQ*
3. What are some of the disadvantages of attending King College? *CRQ*
4. How have social interactions with other students contributed to your decision to remain enrolled at King College? *SQ3*
5. How have social interactions with faculty members contributed to your decision to remain enrolled at King College? *SQ2*
6. What does King College provide that has contributed to your decision to remain enrolled? *SQ1*
7. What specific experiences have you had at King College that have contributed to your satisfaction with the institution? *SQ1*

8. What particular experiences have contributed to your intention to return to King College?

SQ1

Questions related to the *Central Research Question* provided data on the impact of racism, inherent in the nation's educational system, perpetuates pre-college barriers that affect African American males' enrollment, retention, and graduation in higher education (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Broomes, 2017; Harper, 2015: and NCES, 2017).

SQ1 provided data on strategies to improve the persistence of African American males, based on their personal experiences (Brooms, 2017; Cerezo et al., 2015; Tolliver, III & Miller, 2018), including mental health support (Boyraz et al., 2016).

SQ2 identified the themes associated with the social experiences of *African American* males that influence their persistence in college (Baker et al., 2020; 2021; Goings, 2016; 2018; Harper, 2012; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Preston & Palmer, 2018; Shappie & Debb, 2019).

SQ3 supported the need to study and replicate the positive experiences of African American males in college to broaden the opportunities for college enrollment (Brooms, 2018; Druery & Brooms, 2019; Goings, 2016; Goings, 2018; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

For each focus group, each transcript was extracted for meaningful and descriptive statements about their students' experiences and grouped to generate themes (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). In addition, these themes were categorized into a textural description emphasizing the "what" of their experience or a structural description emphasizing the "how" of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 120–121). Next, I combined the textural and structural descriptions to create a textural-structural description that captures the essence of the

participant's experience. This procedure was repeated for each participant, culminating in a "complete textural-structural description" of the student's experience, contributing to their persistence in college (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). Validation was improved by employing member checking before constructing the composite textural-structural description to get insight into the accuracy and relevance of the themes in each textural-structural description (Creswell, 2013). In this stage, epoché was used to revisit any biases and assess how they influenced final interpretations.

The six vital steps used for semi-structured interviews also were applied for focus group data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; King & Brooks, 2021; Saldaña, 2013; 2021). First, transcriptions for all focus groups were obtained electronically via Teams. Second, the data were organized for coding. Third, coding was completed systematically, and the data was analyzed. The linked dataset contained instances of first-level coding. The second coding cycle included identifying all patterns, concentrated, axial, theoretical, elaborate, and longitudinal (Saldaña, 2021). Fourth, categorize the data (Saldaña, 2021) to identify similar characteristics. Fifth, identify common themes and make interpretations. Finally, I maintained a reflective journal to keep my ideas and decisions clear, consistent, and straightforward.

Focus groups confirmed the students' experiences and provided additional insights into interviews and observations. Therefore, they helped ensure, extend, enrich understanding and provide further insights (Gill & Baillie, 2018). Focus groups also indicated that the participants' social engagement frequently led to active conversation, capturing rich, valuable data (Gill & Baillie, 2018). Focus groups were recorded and reported using a three-pronged approach. First, I used an open-coding technique to analyze each line to identify common themes in the data. Second, I organized data gathered from the participants. Their comments on the transcripts were

used to categorize the findings and convert them into themes for analysis of the results. Finally, quotes from focus groups enhanced the participants' individual experiences. Common themes were vetted with participants and additional analysis for accuracy.

Survey

Data collection for the senior exit survey relied on various techniques and approaches, including epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and textural/structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). The King College Office of Institutional Research administered a senior exit survey prior to graduation. Responses from 20% (approximately 80 students) of the spring 2022 seniors will be reviewed and compared to those themes that emerge from the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The following are several questions that appear in King College's senior exit survey (King, DIRE, 2021).

Senior Exit Survey Questions

1. Why would you recommend Morehouse College to a friend or relative considering college? *CRQ*

Participants will provide data on factors contributing to their enrollment, retention, and goal of graduation from Morehouse College (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Broomes, 2016; Harper, 2015; NCES, 2017).

2. Why are you not inclined to recommend Morehouse to a friend or relative? *SQ1*

The information provided by participants was used to improve the experiences of African American males in college (Brooms, 2018; Druery & Brooms, 2019; Goings, 2016, 2018; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

3. Thinking about your entire academic experience at Morehouse, how satisfied are you with each of the following? *SQ3*

- a. Opportunities to participate in research with a faculty member
- b. Out-of-class availability of faculty
- c. Availability of courses you wanted to take outside your major
- d. Quality of instruction in courses
- e. Size of classes
- f. Overall undergraduate education

Participants indicated their overall satisfaction with their college experience (Brooms, 2017, 2018; Clark & Brooms, 2018; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012). Data analysis included descriptive statistics, such mean, median, and mode.

4. How would you rate each of the following? *SQ2*
 - a. Your academic experience
 - b. Your social experience
 - c. Quality of other King students
 - d. Selection of student organizations and activities
 - e. Campus safety
 - f. Campus facilities (residence halls, classrooms, recreational, etc.)
 - g. Communication from the College (faculty, staff, administration)

Participants provided data on how social integration positively influenced institutional commitment, the primary predictor of student persistence (Baker et al., 2019; Broady et al.,

2017; Johnson et al., 2017). Data analysis included descriptive statistics, such as mean, median, and mode.

7. How has the Morehouse College experience has contributed to my academic/intellectual development by enhancing? *CRQ*

Participants described how familiar they are with the academic expectations of college (Brooms, 2017, 2018; Clark & Brooms, 2018; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012).

8. The Morehouse College experience has contributed to my cultural and aesthetic awareness by providing... *CRQ*

- a. Assistance in alleviating ethnic stereotyping
- b. Assistance in alleviating gender stereotyping
- c. Experiences to help me understand individuals from other cultures
- d. Experiences that contribute to my cultural identity
- e. Development of my ability to assess situations from a moral and ethical perspective

Participants indicated if that campus involvement with ethnic organizations was significant (Brooms, 2017, 2018; Clark & Brooms, 2018; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012). Data analysis included descriptive statistics, and I used the three main types of central tendency, mean, median, and mode, to describe the current seniors' responses.

I used descriptive statistics to summarize institutional data. These data provided a quality assurance based on a larger population of the students attending the selected site. I discussed the selected questions that produced measures of central tendency, either too high or too low. In addition, I discussed what happens if the dispersions are too low. By comparing the descriptive

statistics obtained from the institutional survey, I strengthened the findings and themes from the semi-structured interviews and the focus groups.

Survey Data Analysis Plan

I used descriptive statistics to analyze this phenomenological research by describing and summarizing the data, including any emerging patterns. Based on Moustakas's (1994) approach to transcendental phenomenology, I reviewed the data, reduced the data to meaningful components, and re-assess those reductions to engage in thematic clustering. By comparing the data and writing descriptions, I incorporated the survey data into the reflections and summaries derived from the semi-structured interviews and focus groups to strengthen the answers to my research questions.

Using the institutional survey as one of the data collection methods is appropriate for this phenomenological research because descriptive statistical analysis provides the conduit to enhance the descriptions of the student population being studied (Vagle, 2018). Through measurements of central tendency, I obtained more detailed data that can be acquired through surveys. In addition, these data contributed to insight and patterns of students' views.

Descriptive statistics characterize the fundamental characteristics of data in a study by providing summaries of the population being studied (Murphy, 2021). It is described what the data show. Using descriptive statistics offers a concise overview to enhance a qualitative study. I compared the institutional survey data to the themes from individual interviews and focus groups in this study. Descriptive statistics in qualitative research allow researchers to examine a phenomenon of interest in a different context to improve the understanding of the phenomenon (Murphy, 2021). Most significantly, I summarized the data using descriptive statistics for data

analysis allowed me to make an early assessment of the reasonableness of my crucial research topic (Crede & Harms, 2021).

Data Synthesis

Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and survey questions were selected based on the existing literature on African American males' admission, enrollment, persistence, and experiences in higher education (Brooms, 2017, 2018; Clark & Brooms, 2018; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Boyraz et al., 2016; Goings, 2018; Elliott et al., 2018; Simmons, 2019). Based on the collection, synthesis, and analysis of the data obtained on the participants' lived experiences as African American male students enrolled in a historically Black, all-male, liberal arts college, I was able to answer my research questions by identifying those major themes that contribute to the satisfaction and ultimately the retention of African American males in higher education, which could lead to an improved understanding of the experiences that influenced their college achievement and identity formation as African American males.

Moustakas's (1994) last step of analysis in processing phenomenological data is to create a composite of the participants' common experiences to portray the participants' lived experiences concerning the phenomenon accurately. In horizontalization, each statement has equal value and contributes to the meaning and understanding of the phenomenon from the participant's and researcher's perspectives. It is important to note that invariant horizons identify the unique qualities of participants' experiences and those that stand out (Moustakas). Given the nature of my study, the horizontalization of the participants' responses validates the phenomenon.

One significant challenge of phenomenological research is interpreting common themes required for bracketing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interpretative analysis was critical

for this research method and bases inferences on a participant's recollection of their lived experience and my attempt to understand it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The core of every phenomenological study was reporting the essence of the participants' experiences.

After organizing and analyzing the data, I summarized the entire study, distinguished current findings from prior research, suggested opportunities for further investigation and discussed the results in phrases of social meanings and personal and expert values (Moustakas, 1994). This study synthesized the essence of the participants' lived experiences. Each source of evidence, including the interviews, focus groups, and surveys, is explained and synthesized into a coherent singular body of evidence that identifies themes and answers the research questions. All data sources and components were used to generate unique themes based on the results of the data analysis. I followed several steps to analyze the data I collected in my research, including organizing the data, identifying ideas and concepts, identifying and compiling themes in the data, assessing the reliability and validity of the data analysis and findings, determining plausible explanations for the results, and evaluating the final steps (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003). This process was appropriate for my research design. After the data were collected, synthesized, and analyzed from each source, individual interviews, focus groups, and survey data, I identified the most pervasive themes of my research. These combined sources provided the evidence to answer my research questions (Appendix K).

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research provides a unique position to give researchers data directly tied to the human experience since it is process-based, narrated, and storied (Stahl and King, 2020). They also emphasized the importance of having faith in both the researcher and the research. Qualitative researchers must be trustworthy because they must establish the reality in their work.

They also pointed out that there must be trust in both the researcher and the research. Since qualitative researchers must construct the reality in which they work, they must also be trustworthy. Each participant reviewed their transcripts from the semi-structured interviews and focus groups for accuracy to strengthen their credibility. Participants' exact words were used in code identification. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

The two forms of credibility were triangulation and member checking. Using triangulation involved repeatedly applying several sources of information or procedures to establish identifiable patterns in studies (Stahl & King, 2020). Although there were multiple forms of triangulation, this study used three data sources to identify the common themes in the phenomenon.

Triangulation

Data triangulation refers to utilizing many data sources rather than diverse data creation processes by allowing researchers to achieve the highest theoretical return (Denzin, 1970). Denzin also distinguished data triangulation and recommended that the same phenomena be studied at “different times, in different locations, and with different people” (Fusch et al., 2018, p. 20). First, I collected the data from interviews, focus groups, and surveys from my sources. Then I compared and cross-checked the themes of the interviews with the focus groups to identify the most pervasive themes. Finally, I compared the themes from the interviews and focus groups with the survey. The results supported my central research and sub-questions to strengthen my conclusions.

Member Checking

The researcher was frequently both the data collector and the data analyst in qualitative research, leading to researcher bias (Birt et al., 2016). Qualitative researchers may force their own opinions and interests on all phases of the research process, resulting in the researcher's voice overpowering the participants'. However, actively incorporating the research participants in the data checking and validation process helps minimize the risk of researcher bias. Member checking, also known as respondent validation or participant validation, is the process of returning an interview or analyzed data to a participant. Member checking validated, verified, and assessed the trustworthiness of qualitative results (Birt et al., 2016). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking improved qualitative research because verified and accurate descriptions or interpretations strengthen data credibility and trustworthiness. I conducted member checking by returning the interview transcript to participants to compare my interpretation of the synthesized data. I also asked focus group participants for approval that the researcher had accurately reported their reported narratives and sought additional comments.

Transferability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability was challenging because qualitative research did not (cannot) seek replicability by design. On the other hand, qualitative researchers believed that patterns and descriptions from one environment can be applied to another (Stahl & King, 2020). I used the themes and patterns identified in my study that can be transferred to other postsecondary institutions, regardless of type and sector, to improve the college-going rates of African American males. Maxwell's (2021) discussion on the importance of qualitative research for internal and external generalizations was significant for my study; this was because this research will contribute to the literature regarding the experiences and

educational processes of African American males at an HBCU that can be applied to students regardless of race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, or the type of postsecondary institution they attend.

Dependability

In qualitative research, dependability was essential to create trust. However, many qualitative researchers argued that once credibility has been established, it is unnecessary to demonstrate one's dependability to individual participants (Devault, 2019). If a researcher allowed the phrases to be deconstructed, this made it appear that credibility was more related to validity, while dependability appeared to be more connected to reliability. However, I ensured that I did not generalize beyond the sample data since I knew relevant details and context (Devault, 2019). Stahl and King (2020) recommended two strategies: peer debriefing and managing one's influences. First, researchers used peer debriefing or scrutiny to communicate trust by asking another researcher to read and react to their field notes to confirm their findings. Second, researchers should "monitor the influence of their values and passions" by being transparent to participants about "their entailment in their research" (Stahl and King, p.27). I used the latter by being transparent with the participants and managing my passion for the topic to maintain trust and dependability. This study was straightforward and can be replicated across higher education, regardless of student or institutional type, as Tinto's (1975) theory of academic and social integration has been applied for decades.

Confirmability

When conducting qualitative research to replicate previous work, the researcher must ensure the data categories are internally consistent. Researchers must provide rules that specify category attributes and can be used to justify the inclusion of each data piece that is assigned to a

particular category and create a foundation for future replicability studies (Devault, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Other researchers must duplicate the results to prove that the results are the product of independent research methodologies rather than intentional or unconscious bias. Confirmability refers to the degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondent's and not the researcher's biases, motivations, or interests (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To establish confirmability, I developed and maintained an audit trail (Appendix J) on the details of the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes. After collecting, summarizing, and evaluating data from each source, including individual interviews, focus groups, and survey data, I determined the most significant themes of my research. These sources were combined to provide evidence to answer my research questions.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the highest moral and ethical standards. The integrity of the process was preserved by protecting the anonymity of the participants. No hurt, harm, or danger resulted to any of the participants. The data were validated with the participants for accuracy. Participation in the study was voluntary. Manti and Licari (2018) indicated that participants should understand the research to decide whether to consent and participate in the research. Creswell (2018) identifies ethical considerations before reporting that study's findings. Two ethical concerns that were relevant to my research are (among others) obtaining IRB approval and identifying a site that will not create conflict with other researchers. At the beginning of the study, Creswell recommended having an informal conversation with participants, advising them that participation is optional, and developing trust with participants. During the collection phase, two of Creswell's recommendations also resonated with me: providing incentives to participants and not asking questions not included in the interview protocol. According to Creswell, the most

important ethical consideration while analyzing data is to protect the identity of the participants. I protected the anonymity of participants was preserved through pseudonyms and the removal of any other identifying information.

It was critical to remain unbiased and credit other researchers and participants in the final stage of a study- reporting, sharing, and storing data. Upon satisfactory completion and approval of my dissertation, I ensured all identifiable data were deleted, including shredding all consent forms and paper files and permanently destroying any electronic files on memory drives, personal computers, laptops, and file servers. No data was saved on institutional desktop computers, nor will anyone else have access to my computer. The data will be maintained for five years and stored in a secured fire-resisted lockbox in my attic.

Summary

Chapter Three described this study's procedures, research design, and analysis. The design of this phenomenological study was based on the individual living experiences of African American male students enrolled at a historically Black liberal arts college. Chapter Three explicitly addresses the study's design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, and data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys of the participants and student population. Although existing research identifies common themes that contribute to the enrollment, graduation, and retention rates of African American males at PWIs, there is limited research on students' satisfaction with and intention to return to HBCUs. By identifying factors contributing to African American male students' satisfaction with and intent to return to a historically Black liberal arts college, this transcendental phenomenological study improves higher education administrators' understanding of the strategies to improve African American males' college enrollment and retention and graduation rates. In addition, the research

contributed to the stereotype threat and student persistence theories. Finally, it also addressed a significant gap in the literature related to the success of African American males, not just at HBCUs but also at the nation's only higher education institution created for the express purpose of assisting in their attainment of college degrees.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter Four presents the results of my data as findings based on the procedures, research design, and analysis for this research study. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the persistence experiences of African American male students based on the individual living experiences of African American male students enrolled at a historically Black liberal arts college. The central research question was: What were the persistent experiences of African American males enrolled at a historically Black liberal arts college? The sub-questions were: Sub-question One: What personal reasons contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants attending an HBCU? Sub-question Two: What social experiences contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants attending an HBCU? Sub-question Three: What institutional experiences contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants attending an HBCU? The 12 participants are briefly described in this chapter. A qualitative study was critical, and a phenomenological design was appropriate because the participants' prior experiences with pre-enrollment, educational assistance, and social experiences while enrolling in and attending college were obtained (Adom et al., 2018). Purposeful sampling and then snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. A demographic survey, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups were used to collect data from the participants. Chapter Four also includes the data, in narrative themes, charts, graphs, or tables, presented by theme, outlier data, and research question responses.

Participants

Twelve (12) participants were included in the study. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants. All were students at King College in Georgia, designated as an all-male HBCU. Although all participants were males and African Americans, the sample was diverse, including personalities. There were two Communications and two Theatre majors, but a variety of other majors, including Business, Biology, Computer Science, Physics, and Philosophy. Two participants were double majors. Most (seven) of the participants were classified as juniors. The remaining students were seniors. Eight of the 12 participants were from states outside of Georgia. One was born in the Caribbean. 11 of the 12 participants are in their twenties, and one is 32. Most of the participants are enrolled full-time, one part-time. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

In addition, all participants were asked to complete a Demographic Survey in Survey Monkey. Ten of the 12 participants completed the Demographic Survey. The purpose of the demographic survey was to illustrate further that the sample was diverse, although the institution is single-gender and predominantly African American. Reported grade-point averages (GPA) ranged from 2.50/4.00 index to 4.00/4.00 index. Six participants reported a grade point average ranging from 3.5-4.00/4.00 index. Eight of the participants had earned 90-120 credits, while two students had earned 60-90 credit hours. Seven students indicated that their mothers had earned bachelor's and or graduate degrees. All respondents indicated that their fathers earned a minimum of a bachelor's degree. Half (5) of the respondents stated that they worked while enrolled, most less than 15 hours each week. Of the respondents, eight indicated that they received scholarships. Table 2 provides additional demographic data on the participants.

Table 1*Participants*

Name	Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Major	Class	State of Residency
1. Alpha	African American	Male	21	Business/ Finance	Senior	Missouri
2. Beta	African American	Male	21	Kinesiology	Junior	Maryland
3. Gamma	African American	Male	21	Theater/ Spanish	Junior	Illinois
4. Delta	African American	Male	22	Economics	Senior	Illinois
5. Epsilon	African American	Male	22	Physics	Senior	Georgia
6. Zeta	African American	Male	21	Philosophy	Junior	Louisiana
7. Eta	African American	Male	20	Sociology	Junior	New York
8. Theta	African American	Male	21	Computer Science	Senior	Pennsylvania
9. Iota	African American	Male	21	Communications	Junior	Georgia
10. Lambda	African American	Male	21	Communications /Sociology	Junior	Mississippi
11. Mu	African American	Male	32	Theater	Senior	Georgia
12. Nu	African American	Male	20	Biology	Junior	Georgia

Table 2*Demographic Survey*

Characteristic	Number of Respondents		
Grade Point Average	3.50-4.00 6	3.00-3.50 2	2.50-3.00 2
Current EARNED Credit Hours	60-90 Credit Hours 2		90-120 Credit Hours 8

What is the highest level of school your mother completed or the highest degree she received?	High School Diploma 3	Bachelor's Degree 4	Graduate Degree 3
What is the highest level of school your father completed or the highest degree she received?	High School Diploma 0	Bachelor's Degree 7	Graduate Degree 3
Did you receive financial aid?	Scholarships 8	Loans 6	Grants 3
Employed	Yes 5	No 5	

Alpha

Alpha is a 21-year-old African American male from a major city in the Midwest. A graduating senior in Business/Finance, Alpha grew up in a single-mother household and never met his biological father. He attended a majority African American high school with a graduating class of 2,000. Alpha lived with his uncle in his early childhood in one of the dangerous areas in St. Louis, Ferguson. He also indicated that his grandparents' house was around the corner from where Mike Brown was killed. Alpha experienced rioting first-hand and remembered tear gas polluting the air, which kept him from leaving home many nights. Alpha stated that his uncle always "pushed the narrative of knowledge is power." He is active in various organizations on campus and thrives academically.

Beta

Beta is a 21-year-old African American male from a major city on the East Coast. He is a junior majoring in Kinesiology and aspiring to become a physical therapist. Beta began participating in sports at the age of five and has continued while a student at King. He has

maintained a well-balanced college life and is involved with several campus organizations while maintaining an above-average grade point average. He says that his grades, organizations, and social life are all excellent. He further indicated that he would not want to graduate anywhere but King College: "King men make great impacts on the world. It's that simple."

Gamma

Gamma is a 21-year-old African American male from a major city in the Midwest. He is a junior majoring in Theatre with a minor in Spanish, and Gamma is fluent in Spanish. Though serious about his studies as his father was, Gamma is just as engaged in campus activities and relationships. Some of his associations include the Honors and Theatre programs. The key to success at King College, according to Gamma, is "This institution is a place where you can soar if you want it. Many things in life aren't just given to you, and King is not going to give them to you."

Delta

Delta is a 22-year-old African American male from a major city in the Midwest. He is a graduating senior in the honors program studying Economics. Though Delta had a major setback his first semester at King academically, he was able to pivot both his grades and experience at King. He is a student leader, activist, and volunteers with several organizations in his community. When discussing his involvement in campus activities and organizations, Delta stated that "I've had the pleasure and privilege of being able to contribute to and solve issues daily at King to make our community a better place. While I've only had four years, I am proud to be able to walk through campus and see my hard work, legacy, and positive impact live on at our college."

Epsilon

Epsilon, a former high school athlete, is a 22-year-old African American male from a suburb of a major city in Georgia. He is a graduating senior in Physics, excels academically and socially, and is a member of several campus organizations. Epsilon's experience at King has been life changing. "King gave me so much room to grow. What I was graced with does not exist in any other part of the country. You can't even go to another HBCU and find this environment. This is humbling."

Zeta

Zeta is a 21-year-old African American male from a major city in the Southeast. He attended an all-black, all-male private Catholic High School that pushed him to continue his education. They stressed that like high school was not enough. Consequently, there were always conversations about college and the next steps. Zeta emphasized, "my entire high school graduating class got into any four-year university, they could. Universities were lined up to give us scholarships because we were young black men. Zeta is a junior, first-generation college student majoring in Philosophy. He has been successful academically and socially. He describes his experience as "the love of just belonging. I belong where I have an impact, where I am not just existing."

Eta

Eta, a junior, is a 20-year-old African American male from a major city in New England, majoring in Philosophy. Eta, a first-generation college student, born in the Caribbean, graduated from an all-Black high school. King provided a similar sense of security and familiarity for him. "I feel like I wouldn't get the experience I'm getting right now anywhere else. 2000 Black men in

the same place with the same goal is one in a million, and I don't see that happening anywhere else."

Theta

Theta is a 21-year-old African American male from a major city in the Midwest. He is a graduating senior in Computer Science. Theta has had various experiences through multiple organizations, which has allowed him to cultivate relationships. In addition, he has received various academic awards to balance his experience at King College. His advice to new students is, "From the jump, take advantage of everything available. That includes staying on top of your grades, looking for internship opportunities, and joining clubs. You need to hit the ground running with all of that."

Iota

Iota is a 21-year-old African American male from a suburb of a major city in Georgia. He is a graduating senior majoring in Communications. He first visited King College in 6th grade, attending a predominantly black school, and believed King to be an older version of his current school. However, on his second tour as a high school sophomore, where he attended a predominantly white high school, he realized how much he had been missing the black culture. According to Iota, "I felt like I had to come to King. King is what you make it. If you're not involved, it will not be the best experience."

Lambda

Lambda is a 21-year-old African American male from a small town in a southern state. Before attending college. Lambda was a very active student in high school, from being the Woodwind Conductor in the marching band to the Student Body President to an Eagle Scout. Lambda is a junior Communications and Sociology double major with a Criminal Justice minor.

He also sees himself as a very social person and a man of God. Lambda knew that he wanted to be a reputable organizational leader by his senior. His strategy was to join several organizations during his first year, including the President of his freshman hall. Throughout his time in college, he interned with Fortune 500 companies and was initiated into Phi Beta Kappa. Lambda indicated that “I knew that I wanted to go to Harvard Law School. So, going to King would increase my chances of a prestigious law school.”

Mu

Mu is a 32-year-old African American male from a major city in Georgia. He is a graduating senior majoring in Theatre. Mu attended King College about ten years ago but took a leave of absence his sophomore year to pursue his goals in entertainment. He returned during the pandemic with his scholarship intact and the maturity to appreciate his experience at King. “Ultimately, I want to add to that brotherhood and long legacy of history. I want to write my name with the indelible ink of great people who have done great things.”

Nu

Nu is a 20-year-old African American male, a junior Biology major and Public Health minor from a small city in Georgia. King is involved in various campus organizations and activities, including the Student Government Association and Undergraduate Health Science Academy at King School of Medicine. Even during the height of the pandemic, his sophomore year, he joined other clubs and organizations to connect with other students and advisors and faculty outside of the biology department. “King feels like a brotherhood. I do a lot of things on campus. I know a lot of people.”

Results

The focus of this phenomenological study was to describe African American males' lived experiences that contributed to their persistence in higher education. This study was guided by one central research question and three sub-research questions. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups and survey questions were used to collect, synthesize, and analyze the data obtained on the participants' lived experiences as African American male students enrolled in a historically Black, all-male, liberal arts college. The data lead to four significant themes contributing to the satisfaction and ultimately the retention of African American males in higher education. The study's findings provided a better understanding of the experiences that influenced their enrollment and persistence in college. Moustakas's (1994) epoché, phenomenological reduction (bracketing, horizontalization, the clustering of themes and textural descriptions), imaginative variation (structural descriptions), and synthesis of textural and structural descriptions guided the data collection and analysis.

After transcription and member checking, I read each participant's transcript and took general notes with short descriptions to generalize the meaning of their school experiences. These comments offered a broad overview of each and aided the researcher in starting the open coding process. (Creswell, 2019). The data were broken down into brief descriptive starting codes using open coding. (Creswell, 2019). I used Microsoft Excel and Word to create descriptions for each participant and organized the descriptions using the following categories: interview question, response, initial notes, and notable quotes. Sample quotes were highlighted to emphasize their importance. I identified a total of 85 codes (Appendix G).

In collecting, analyzing, and integrating the data, I recorded my assumptions in a retrospective journal. I used those opportunities to get a renewed perspective on the participants'

experiences. The reflective journal allowed me to release any preconceptions, misleading thoughts, or emotions and ensure that my consciousness remained free and open (Moustakas, 1994). Transcripts of semi-structured interviews and focus groups were vetted with participants and thoroughly reread to ensure accuracy. Statements from all data sources were treated equally by synthesizing and eliminating repetitive statements. I examined each account for possible structural implications. Then these statements were manually coded and grouped into themes during phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994).

Table 3 shows how all participants shared similar experiences based on the code created. Axial coding is used to group similar codes into categories. The codes are narrowed down to categories. If a participant experiences the code, a checkmark indicates that experience. If five or more participants shared the code, it was color-coded into significant categories (Table 4). The final number of categories identified by participants was 25 (Creswell, 2019). After evaluating the interviews and focus groups, the first code was created and further evolved into an open code. Four main themes and nine sub-themes were identified from open coding. Table 4 shows the themes and sub-themes for each triangulation data source.

Table 3*Codes and Categories*

Codes	Categories
1 Parental support, Family value education, Encourage	Family Foundation
2 Family alumni, Support system, Motivation	Family Support
3 Friends, Peers, Communities, Fraternities	Peer Relationships
4 High school counselors and Teachers	High schools
5 Mentors support, Positive impact	Mentors and Role Models
6 School Support, Clubs and Organizations, Academic Support	School Support
7 Peer, Community awards, Social Media, Volunteerism	Community Support
8 Academic success, Graduated, College student, HS Honors believed they were academically successful, GPA requirement	Academic Performance
9 Community of African American men, Friendship, Fraternities, Motivation	Brotherhood
10 Leadership opportunities and skills.	Leadership and Cooperation Skills
11 Graduated, Financial Aid, Pride, College student	College
12 Leadership, Leadership opportunities, Play sports, PWI, HBCU, Other colleges and universities, Opportunity	College
13 Successful, Personal development, Goal as a child to attend college, Ambitious	Personal Aspirations
14 Impact of COVID, School experiences impacted by COVID, COVID-19 Pandemic	Community
15 Alumni Family and Friends, Love, Role models	Brotherhood
16 School climate, Racism, Representation	Race
17 Advocacy, Potential, Positive, intellectually challenging, Leaders, Participate	Connections
18 Believes African American males have to work harder than others; Negative stigmatism around black males from society, Societal Expectations for African American Males, Legacy	Societal Expectations for African American Males
19 Culture, Believes African American males have to work harder than others, Exhausted, Frustrated	African American Male Expectations
20 Independence, Future opportunities	Better Future
21 Need degree for career goals, Respectable	Degree
22 Skills, Bridge to life, Money	Future Career
23 Improve finances, Jobs, Workforce	Future Career
24 Email, social media, Campus Events, Conversations	Communication
25 Role models, Support, Advising, Virtual instruction, Internships, Giving	Faculty

Table 4*Themes and Subthemes*

Theme	Subthemes
Relationships	Family, friends, peers, faculty, teachers, counselors, and alumni
Better Future	Future Independence Personal Goal
Brotherhood	Community Fraternity
Surpass stereotypes	Better skills More skills Societal expectations

Theme1: Relationships

Relationships with family, faculty, staff, students, teachers, coaches, and others were the most pervasive theme for the central research question and the three sub-questions. According to Nu, “All of my family members have gone to college or gone back to college to get their degrees, their education. So, I wanted to take that same path.” Ten (10) of the 12 students indicated family foundation, support, or encouragement as their primary reason for enrolling in college. A college education also was ingrained in Mu’s childhood. “Education was significant in our household growing up. My Mom, a retired schoolteacher, would not allow us to go out on weeknights because it was a school night. It was an essential part of just growing up.”

Nu described his experience as making campus connections. “Honestly, it’s a lot of love and support that I have gotten from my brothers, faculty, and staff. It has played a major role in keeping me in school. And helping me to excel in what I can be.” Gamma added, “Since the classroom sizes aren’t that huge, it is easier to have a better relationship with the instructor. They like looking out for you and will host a dinner or a meeting or something fun.” When describing

the impact of the pandemic on connections, Mu stated, “Being back on campus allowed me to forge ahead with a lot of great relationships. Connection and that type of experience are so remarkable. The network in the community is so embracing and supportive. Points me in the right direction.”

The focus groups allowed me to gather additional data from multiple students on their satisfaction with King College and the factors influencing their intent to return to the College. Two focus groups were held, one with four students and the second with six students. The focus group discussions supported the central research questions, three sub-questions, and three of the four themes identified in the semi-structured interviews.

Subtheme 1: Family, friends, peers, faculty, teachers, counselors, and alumni

The participants in the focus groups stressed relationships with family, faculty, staff, students, teachers, coaches, and others. According to Iota, “I think some of the advantages [of attending a small school] are building relationships with your professors pretty easily.” Figure 1 depicts the relationship theme described by Iota. In Figure 2, Alpha indicated, “I learned that Pride keeps the alumni coming back and helping students out. Just the name a lot of people, many companies, come to King to get more educated Black men, and it pays off in the end.”

Figure 1

Iota on Relationships with Faculty



Figure 2

Alpha on Relationships with Alumni



Theme 2: Improved Career Opportunities

The second theme was improved career opportunities. There were two subthemes: future independence and personal goals. All of the students indicated that college was essential for

long-term career goals and advancement. Gamma explained, “College is a bridge to get to where you want to be or where you need to be in society. You have to know more things as far as skillset and being aware.” Alpha agreed, “I always looked at higher education as another opportunity, and I knew that more opportunities would be available once I got into college. I would be able to experience more of life.” Beta had a similar response, “I’ve had friends who were top students in high school and didn’t go to college. I knew that I was just a good fit for the culture, and I needed the development for my life.”

Improved career opportunities also emerged from the participants in the focus groups. “Coming in and developing my network, we had several events sponsored by Bank of Montreal and Harris Bank, “Delta discussed the benefits of specific experiences at King College that contributed to his success. Figure 3 depicts Delta’s experiences at King College.

Figure 3

Delta on Improved Career Opportunities



Subtheme 2: Future independence and personal goals

Future independence and personal goals are the subthemes. Although referenced in the context of improving career prospects, future independence, and personal goals align with college and career goals. According to Epsilon, “As a high school senior, I realized I have just enough independence to realize that I don’t have as much as I need as much as I would like.” Alpha agreed, “I knew that I had to be independent and depend on myself to become the person that I wanted to be. I had to push myself to grow up even though I was hesitant.”

Theme 3: Brotherhood

Brotherhood was the third theme, with community and fraternity as subthemes. Brotherhood and King College are synonymous in the African American and HBCU communities. When discussing those factors contributing to Lambda attending King College, he indicated, “I wanted to attend King because of the name. There would be a diverse group of Black men trying to get the same education to push me to be the best.” Mu said, “It was understood from an early age that I was being groomed for King. All of my efforts in high school were to attend King.” Mu’s efforts and family indoctrination paid off. He was awarded a full academic presidential scholarship. Though he only stayed his first two years, he returned to graduate and was able to keep his scholarship. While initially enrolled, Mu’s music career flourished and conflicted with his studies. Instead of squandering his opportunity and scholarship, he took a leave of absence.

Subtheme 3: Community and Fraternity

Making connections or being a part of the King community, including student organizations and fraternities, was stressed by all participants. “I was just making connections. You never know what door you can get into. That was a big thing for me,” said Nu. Ten of the 12 students in the study were members of a fraternity. None of those in the fraternity limited

their campus connections to the fraternity. Other activities included editor of the student newspaper, Oprah Winfrey scholar, track athlete, and Student Government Association officer.

Figure 4

Beta on Brotherhood



Similarly, the third theme of brotherhood was identified in focus groups. All focus group participants discussed the impact of the brotherhood at King College on their experiences. In Figure 4, Beta said, “You form different bonds. I remember saying this in our first meeting. I formed different bonds with different guys, and they became deeper and deeper over the years.” Alpha echoed a similar sentiment, “I like creating those strong lifelong relationships with my brothers. You would hate to go to college in continue to not know anybody and not be socially engaged and not have a group of friends we can hang out with” (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Alpha on Relationships



Approximately 50% (207) of graduates had completed the College's *Senior Survey* several weeks before the ceremony (Tables 5 and 6). Of those, 69% were satisfied with their overall education, and 72% would recommend King College to a friend or relative; 42% were without reservations (Table 5). This coincides with theme #3: Brotherhood. Ironically, the responses to the questions on academic advising are related to outlier #1. In addition, those responses are related to theme #2 since 57% of graduates agreed that their academic advisor helped them reflect on their professional goals. However, 43% of graduates changed advisors. The graduates' responses to their residence hall experiences, school climate, and extracurricular activities are pertinent to themes #1 and #2, with 60% of graduates agreeing that the residence halls enhanced a strong sense of community and support, and 55% were satisfied with the climate for student diversity on campus. Over 50% of graduates participated in extracurricular activities, with 65% indicating that they could balance their academic work and extracurricular activities.

The data on graduates who worked during college is related to the *Demographic Survey* included in the research. Of the 6% of graduates who worked for pay during their college years,

12% worked on campus, and 14% worked more than 10 hours per week on campus, compared to 33% of graduates who worked more than 10 hours per week off-campus. Most (56%) graduates received financial assistance from King. However, 28% of graduates personally borrowed at least \$25,000 for their undergraduate education. It should be noted that more than half (54%) of graduates indicated that paying for college had a moderate to severe impact on their families, with 22% indicating that their parents or family will help pay off their loans.

Table 5

Results of Senior Survey

Themes One: Relationships, Two: Better Future, and Three: Brotherhood

Areas	Extremely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Extremely dissatisfied	Total
Overall quality of instruction	41	112	32	17	5	207
Academic advising before declaring a major	43	59	42	38	22	204
Out-of-class availability of faculty	40	84	43	32	8	207
Social life on campus	85	84	23	9	3	207
Climate for student diversity on campus	65	82	40	13	4	204
Sense of community on campus	70	88	29	13	4	204
Sense of community where you live	66	82	37	12	5	202

Level of intellectual excitement on campus	53	81	47	13	10	204
Student clubs and organizations	49	96	38	15	5	204
Overall undergraduate education	71	92	22	17	3	205

Theme 4: Surpass Stereotypes of African American men

The fourth theme was the desire to defy stereotypes. All participants were keenly aware of the societal depictions, negative stereotypes, and glaring statistics on African American men dead before 25, incarcerated, homeless, or unemployed. Beta asserted, “I believe that I was eight or nine years old when a family friend told me that I had to go to college as a Black man.” Theta indicated, “I want to finish what I started. Becoming a King man and having that connection or network of alumni makes sense.” Nu had similar thoughts, “I was always told to finish what you start. That was something that my mom, Grandma, and Dad told me. No matter how hard it. You’ll get through it.”

Subtheme 4: Better skills

Of the 205 graduates responding to the *Senior Survey*, 144 indicated that their experience at King College *helped them reflect on their personal goals*. In addition, 110 discussed how liberal education might fit their professional and career goals, and 109 indicated that their experience assisted them with identifying career areas that match their career goals.

Subtheme 5: Societal Expectations

Participants discussed societal expectations from two perspectives. Primarily, African American men have to be twice as good and work twice as hard in preparation for the workforce, which is supported by the overall theme of exceeding societal stereotypes. Secondly, there are other societal expectations that several participants discussed, preparing for, and understanding corporate America. Theta discussed how as a freshman, he developed relationships with upperclassmen who prepped him on how to be selected for internships. According to Theta, “When applying for internships, I had support from the upperclassman who already had been in those positions. I had help with Interview prep. Understanding the culture (and expectations) that I would be exposed to helped boost my confidence” (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Theta on Corporate Expectations



Table 6*Results of Senior Survey Theme Four: Surpass Stereotypes*

Areas	Extremely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Extremely dissatisfied	Total
Experiences that contribute to my ethnic identity	94	68	32	8	0	202
Experiences that contribute to my cultural identity	90	76	30	4	1	201
Experiences that help me understand individuals from other cultures	80	83	26	10	3	202
Assistance in alleviating gender stereotyping	64	72	46	9	10	201
Assistance in alleviating ethnic stereotyping	67	80	40	9	5	201
Experiences to enhance my appreciation of others and other expression of culture	75	77	44	5	1	202
Development of my racial identity and sense of self	88	85	23	6	2	204
Development of my self-confidence	83	84	29	7	1	204

Positive relationships with my peers	84	93	22	5	0	204
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Nearly 60% of the graduates responding to the institutional *Senior Survey* indicated that the King College experience contributed to their cultural awareness and self-confidence (Table 6). The aforementioned responses support theme #4: Surpass stereotypes. The institutional Senior Survey supported all of the themes identified in the research.

Outlier Data and Findings

Two outliers are worth discussing. These outliers were surprising themes that emerged when discussing how King College could improve the experiences of students. All of the participants indicated a concern with either academic advising or communication. Both are essential for student persistence. These outliers are areas that no institution can afford to ignore.

Outlier Finding #1: Academic Advising

Two participants described first-year experiences that could have determined whether they remained enrolled. As one participant reflected on his advising experience during his first year, he indicated that there was only one advisor for his department, and he had difficulty contacting her. This caused several of his peers to get behind in their classes. In another instance, one of the participants was given a schedule of primarily challenging courses without his input. When he reached his advisor, he was advised that it could not be changed.

His grade point average for his first semester of college was below the 2.00/4.00 index, and he spent the next four years trying to rebuild it. Though discouraged, he persisted and excelled in other ways at King College to improve his experience. Based on his account of his experience, it would have been understandable if he had chosen to drop out or transfer. Even

those students without horrific experiences referenced the need to strengthen academic advising to improve student success.

Outlier Finding #2: Communication

Communication is a significant concern of the participants, and most indicated that email is voluminous and ineffective. It is not surprising that most participants noted that social media is the most effective and frequently used among peers, though not the College.

Ironically, several participants indicated that flyers worked best because they preferred to see the details of a campus event printed and posted. On the other hand, one participant had a creative suggestion that could be readily implemented if King collaborated with a neighboring university. Delta suggested that the College launch a platform or app to communicate with faculty, staff, students, alumni, and donors. According to Delta, “For whatever reason, the College has chosen not to do it. That will solve more than half of the issues. That platform can integrate into all we have. We have so many platforms that don’t talk to each other.”

Research Questions Responses

This phenomenological study described the lived experiences that contributed to the persistence of African American males enrolled in an HBCU dedicated to the higher education of minority males. This study was guided by one central research question and three sub-research questions. The data lead to four significant themes contributing to the satisfaction and ultimately the retention of African American males in higher education. Participants described their experiences at King College, which contributed to their academic and social success.

Central Research Question

What were the persistent experiences of African American males enrolled at a historically Black liberal arts college? All of the participants described that their experiences at King College

provided a unique experience for African American men to be a success in college, the workforce, and life. King equips its students with those intangibles that make a difference between success and failure. Alpha said, “What this college offers that a lot don’t is just genuine love. The advancement of Black men in today’s society.” Beta added, “I want every Black man in America to at least consider King College, at the very least, considering I wouldn’t want to force them.”

Table 7

Open Codes, Theme, and Subthemes for Central Research Question

Open Codes	Occurrence Across All Data Points	Theme	Subthemes
		Relationships	Family, Friends, Peers Faculty, Teachers, Counselors, Alumni
Parental support, Family value education, Encourage	145		
Family alumni, Support system, Motivation	62		
Friends, Peers, Communities, Fraternities	89		
High school counselors Teachers	26		
Mentors support, Positive impact	44		
Role models, Support.	17		
Advising, Virtual instruction, Internships Giving			
PWI, HBCU, Other colleges and universities	116*		

Note: Referenced across themes.

Sub-Question One

What personal reasons contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants attending an HBCU? All of the participants discussed all the

opportunities to be engaged in the community. In the words of Zeta, “You can’t be a three o’clocker.” That’s the reference to students who attend classes only and do not participate in campus activities. Most of the participants indicated that you have to be involved in student activities and events to get the most out of your experience at King College.

Table 8

Open Codes, Theme and Subthemes for Sub-Question One

Open Codes	Occurrence Across All Data Points	Theme	Subthemes
		Future Opportunities	Future Independence Personal Goal
Academic success, Graduated College student, HS Honors believed they were academically successful, GPA requirement	22		
Successful, Personal development, Goal as a child to attend college, Ambitious	47		
Leadership opportunities and skills	15		
Need degree for career goals	103		
Respectable			
Skills, Bridge to life, Money	72		
Improve finances, Jobs Workforce			
Independence, Future opportunities	33		
PWI, HBCU	116		
Other colleges and universities			

Note: Referenced across themes.

Sub-Question Two

What social experiences contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants attending an HBCU? All participants describe positive experiences associated with attending college in general, an HBCU, King College specifically. Social experiences are enhanced because of the location and reputation of the city in which is King is

situated. Alpha said, “You have a lot of Black people surrounding you that are thriving. They are driven individuals. That type of energy continues to push me to want to stay here and finish out my four years.”

Table 9

Open Codes, Theme and Subthemes for Sub-Question Two

Open Codes	Occurrence Across All Data Points	Theme	Subthemes
		Brotherhood	Community Fraternity
School Support, Clubs and Organizations, Academic Support	121		
Alumni Family and Friends, Love Role models	84		
Community of African American men, Friendship, Fraternities, Motivation	77		
Impact of COVID, School experiences impacted by COVID COVID-19 Pandemic	53		
Email, Social Media, Campus Events Conversations	58		
Advocacy, Potential, Positive, Intellectually challenging, Leaders Participate	19		
PWI, HBCU, Other colleges and universities	116		

Note: Referenced across themes.

Sub-Question Three

What institutional experiences contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants attending an HBCU? The participants had a range of reasons for remaining at King College, and some also discussed challenging first year, including grade issues, adjusting to college, and advising concerns. Nevertheless, they all persisted and could imagine being at any other institution. According to Beta, "If I were, say, 20 or 30 years from

now, I would not want to look back and say I transferred that and ended up graduating from another university. Being a student at King College is a lifetime experience."

Table 10

Open Codes, Theme, and Subthemes for Sub-Question Three

Open Codes	Occurrence Across All Data Points	Theme	Subthemes
		Surpass stereotypes	Better skills More skills Societal expectations
Leadership opportunities Skills	15		
Graduated, Financial Aid Pride, College student, Leadership, Leadership opportunities, Play sports	67		
Believes African American males have to work harder than others Negative stigmatism around black males from society Societal Expectations for African American Males, Legacy	78		
Culture, Believes African American males have to work harder than others, Exhausted Frustrated	54		
PWI, HBCU, Other colleges and universities	116		

Note: Referenced across themes.

Summary

Chapter Four discussed the results of my data on the persistence experience of African American male students based on the individual living experiences of African American male students enrolled at a historically Black liberal arts college. The study's data collection methods were reviewed, and the emerging themes were presented through structural and textural descriptions. The data revealed four themes: Relationships, Better Future, Brotherhood, and

Surpass Stereotypes. In addition, the theme's connectivity to the research questions was provided. Relationships and connectivity are the primary reasons the participants persisted at King College. All participants indicated that they would 100% choose King College again. Mu summed it up best, "My top three reasons for staying at King College are legacy, education, and purpose." Finally, tables identifying the codes and themes for the central research question and sub-questions were provided.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to understand the experiences that contributed to the persistence of African American males at a historically Black college. A discussion of the interpretations of the findings, the implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, the limitations and delimitations, and includes recommendations for future research are included in this chapter. There also is an overall summary of the study.

Discussion

Based on the individual living experiences of African American male students enrolled at a historically Black liberal arts college, this study investigated the persistence experiences of African American male students enrolled in a four-year HBCU. The shared experiences of 12 participants were grouped into four themes using the triangulated data sources indicated in the preceding chapter. The most pervasive emerging themes were (a) Relationships, (b) A Brighter Future, (c) Brotherhood, and (d) Exceeding Stereotypes. This section addresses the study's findings in relation to the aforementioned themes and supports the interpretation of those findings with empirical and theoretical literature as well as participant narrative evidence. Interpretation of findings, implications for policy or practice, theoretical and empirical implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research are all covered in the discussion.

Interpretation of Findings

This section presents a summary of the thematic findings, followed by an interpretation. There is a significant gap in documenting the persistence of African American males at

historically Black institutions, specifically, the nation's only higher education institution dedicated to the college attainment of African American males (Baker et al., 2020; Broady et al., 2017, Johnson et al., 2017; NCES, 2017, 2019). The study's themes, subthemes, and phenomenological descriptions provided additional insight and reinforced existing literature. The findings from interviews with African American males enrolled at the nation's only higher education institution dedicated to African American males could have substantial educational implications concerning enrolling, retaining, and graduating African American males in higher education. Similar to other traditional students, African American males require intellectual and social integration to complete their studies (Baker et al., 2021; Tinto, 1975; Wilson et al., 2013).

Tinto's student integration model, often known as persistence theory, offered the foundation for studying African American male persistence in college. Parental education, family background, high school GPA, standardized test scores, and institutional characteristics all played a role in their persistence (Museus et al., 2018; Rhoden, 2017; Simmons, 2017; Tinto, 1975; 1993). Students who felt they belonged in college had a better chance of graduating. Participation in campus organizations, educational activities, and establishing meaningful relationships with instructors, staff, and students are all factors that contribute to African American students' persistence in college. These external factors encouraged these African American males to remain enrolled in college and ultimately graduate (Museus et al., 2018; Rhoden, 2017; Tinto, 1975; 1993). "The extent to which these theories—in whole or in part—apply to minority-serving institutions, such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), has not been researched in-depth," says Tinto (Baker et al., 2021, p. 34). Documenting how these experiences led to positive social and academic integration of African American male

students resulted in significant adjustments and expansions to the existing paradigm (Rhoden, 2017; Tinto, 1975, 1993; Wilson et al., 2013).

There are four common themes among African American males who have completed college. First, mentorship is critical to African American males' college success. All participants indicated that academic, social, or emotional support enabled them to stay in college and graduate. Second, students must be socialized to avoid feeling alienated. Participants in the aforementioned study who assimilated on campus believed they would be able to advance toward their degrees because they had the necessary assistance (Elliott et al., 2018; Tolliver, III & Miller, 2018). The availability of on-campus support services is the third topic linked to African American males graduating from college. In recent studies, some participants mentioned the relevance of campus services in encouraging students to interact with students of different ethnic backgrounds. Finally, student expectations from their families and communities drove them to stay in college and graduate (Elliott et al., 2018; Tolliver, III & Miller, 2018). These themes are critical to the research on the persistence of African American males in higher education.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The following four primary themes emerged from data analysis: relationships, improved career opportunities, brotherhood, and exceeding stereotypes. The themes aligned with the theoretical framework of this phenomenological research study. Relationships with family, faculty, staff, students, teachers, coaches, and others were the most pervasive theme for the central research question and the three sub-questions. However, family values and influence on the participants' decision to enroll in college in general and King College specifically was important. 10 of the 12 participants mentioned family first when describing the main factors

contributing to them enrolling in college. Iota was influenced by a family member who did not attend college. As the students progressed during their journeys, they developed other relationships that contributed to them remaining enrolled and graduating.

The theme of improved career opportunities included the subthemes of future independence and personal goals. All students indicated that college was essential for long-term career goals and advancement. Enrolling in college was attributed to the “success factor” for Delta. “You need to obtain a career path to have success post-high school. College is usually the first steppingstone.” Zeta further expounded, “If I had a capacity for greatness, I needed somewhere to cultivate that. I knew that my education could not stop.” Epsilon added, “I didn’t feel like I knew enough. I didn’t feel like high school gave me everything that I needed.” Lambda provided a summation for enrolling in and graduating from college, “I needed higher education to reach the end goal. The end goal was law school. I couldn’t go straight into the workforce without going to college and grad school. My dream job is to be an attorney.”

The theme of brotherhood had subthemes of community and fraternity as subthemes. The participants throughout the study described the brotherhood associated with King College. According to Nu, "I picked King because I am a legacy. I have family that has gone to King. They told me great stories. I met the other King brothers and saw how King helped them. I saw how they built relationships."

Campus connections with faculty, staff, and other students contributed to the participants' positive experiences in college. King College provided a brotherhood experience for all of the participants. However, 10 of the 12 participants also experienced being in a fraternity in addition to their existing campus relationships. Each described how being in a fraternity further strengthened their bonds as King brothers and fraternity brothers. When reflecting on how

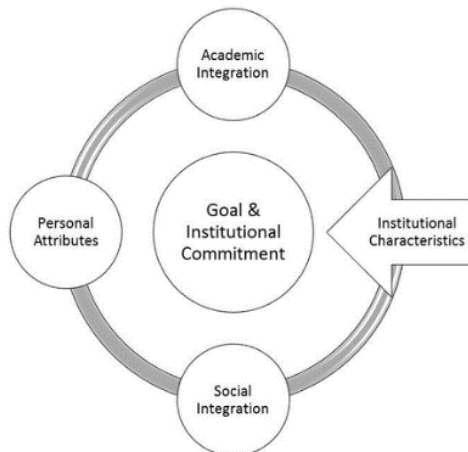
participation in student activities, specifically being in a fraternity, influenced his decision to remain enrolled, Nu indicated, "There's a standard to maintain and a level of expectation of the crown that you have to grow tall enough to wear. That makes you competitive, healthy competition. You have a reason to go to class and be on campus."

The theme of the desire to defy stereotypes included the subthemes of better skills and societal expectations. As a result of cultural demands and expectations, as well as the negative effects of racism, African American males may face concerns, obstacles, and disputes (Arias & Xu, 2019; Bennett, 2021). Nearly 73% of the graduates responding to the institutional *Senior Survey* indicated that the King College experience Assistance in alleviating ethnic stereotyping (Table 6). When asked about the reasons for selecting King College after visiting the campus during his 11th-grade year, Zeta said, "These brothers are contributing to and pursuing excellence. I have to come here. I am seeing brothers who are coming out creating videos for Sesame Street, with 3.8-3.9 GPAs, working in Congress or on Wallstreet."

The major conclusions from the lived experiences of African American males who persist in higher education are that these students have ties with family members to support their aspirations of completing college, as well as relationships on campus to sustain them while navigating their experiences. Despite academic, health, and social problems, participants stayed dedicated to their academic and professional aspirations. Several interpretations were derived from this study and are adapted from "Tinto's Model of Student Retention" (Museus et al., 2018; Rhoden, 2017; Simmons, 2017; Tinto, 1975, 1993).

Figure 7

Tinto's Model of Student Retention



Institutional Characteristics

The majority of research participants and graduates responding to the *Senior Survey* said their experiences at King College were positive and that it was a helpful atmosphere. The small campus climate aided the participants' success, with several stating that the smaller class size allowed for more contact with teachers and peers. The size of the institution was also linked to college persistence (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012). Even after accounting for student characteristics, smaller colleges exhibit a wider range of student achievement than larger colleges (Connolly, 2016; French, 2017; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012). Students who do not obtain a strong educational foundation in high school will struggle in college, especially at significantly larger institutions.

Nevertheless, there are always opportunities to engage in continuous improvement. Participants were asked to identify how academic and social success could be improved at King College. Alpha strongly advocated for students to be encouraged to meet with professors during office hours. "Having one-on-one conversations is much better because the professors can understand the deepest problems you may face in their class, books, or even life." Gamma suggested tutoring and initiative programs. "More frequent check-in and authentic tutoring programs are needed. I know in college, you're on your own and have to figure it out. But many

people don't have the tools, or college is a whole new field for them," said Gamma. Academic and social integration, personal traits, and institutional features all promote students' goals and are anchored in the institution's dedication to academic and student success.

Academic and Social Integration

Students' judgments of their social connection with others, as well as their level of alignment with a college or university's attitudes, beliefs, norms, and values, are referred to as social inclusion (Durkheim, 1951; Tinto, 1975). One intermediate outcome used to assess undergraduate students' achievement was their perseverance in higher education after their first year (Baker et al., 2020; Braxton, 2008, 2016; Braxton et al., 2014). This initial commitment influenced the social integration of the student. As a result, improved social integration influenced student commitment to an institution, a strong predictor of student persistence (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012).

All the participants described their academic and social success as important for their college integration. However, they all indicated that both require hard work, dedication, and commitment. Both must be earned. "It has to be earned. I would describe my academic success, as a grind. I thought it would be similar to high school, or at least felt like it. I was prepared coming out of high school," said Epsilon. According to Iota, "Balancing academic and social success or social presence is based on priorities. I have to stay focused. My grades are pretty good and the benefits of having a degree will go a long way after you are done with school."

Personal Attributes

The participants' focus and determination to succeed contributed to their college success. Each was clear about their goals for the future upon entering college. Several participants discussed high school preparedness and expectations based on the semi-structured interviews.

The subthemes of ensuring financial independence and acquiring better skills are aligned with the participants' personal and career goals, which are connected to two of the identified themes, a better future and surpassing ethnical stereotypes.

Implications for Policy or Practice

Regardless of educational level (i.e., elementary, secondary, or postsecondary), African American males do not achieve the same degree of success as African American females or White males (Hines et al., 2020). As a result, African American males do not graduate from high school, enroll in college, or finish college at the same rates as their White counterparts.

Therefore, there are both policy and practice implications associated with my study.

Implications for Policy

Compared to their White male counterparts, African Americans are five times more likely to die due to homicide. Despite this tendency, no government-sponsored social welfare or public health policy initiatives to help offset its impacts have been presented (Bennett, 2021; Cottrell et al., 2019; Hart et al., 1998; Mode et al., 2016). Authentic federal, state, and local school district policies should be implemented to address this gap by applying strategies discussed in this study of successful African American males in college.

Scholars have advocated for decades that teachers in the United States should be diverse and representational of the students they teach (Cherng & Davis, 2017, 2019; Hill, 2017; Hutchinson & McAlister, 2020). Teacher education programs and policies can benefit and hinder the school as a learning community. The apparent inequalities in instructors' racial and ethnic groupings, on the other hand, have an impact on all aspects of education and communities. As a result, before the massive success gaps between students of color and their White counterparts

can be resolved, the apparent differences in teachers' racial and ethnic origins and the communities they serve must be addressed (Cherng & Davis, 2017, 2019).

The achievement gap and academic attainment levels for kids of color graduating from high school and college remain much lower than for White students (Hill, 2017; Hutchinson & McAlister, 2020). The historical discrepancies between African American males' educational experiences and those of other groups have been laced with racism and its application through politics, which has impeded educational and healthcare reform options that could improve their trajectories (Bell, 1973; 2008).

Implications for Practice

Disparities in college attendance and graduation rates result from poor academic performance among African American boys in metropolitan school systems. When it comes to 18- to 24-year-olds, there are considerable racial and ethnic disparities in college enrollment rates (McFarland et al., 2017; NCES, 2019). Pre-college programs were created to help African American males succeed in college (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Broomes, 2017; Harper, 2015; Hill, 2017; NCES, 2017). More than just college admission is required to ensure that African American males effectively proceed through the college pipeline.

School counselors can help students succeed in college by providing programs and services that support their "individual planning" efforts and addressing inequities that prevent some students from successfully moving from high school to college (Hines et al., 2020). School counselors should provide counseling, advice, and support services to students and their families to ensure that students are suitably prepared for college preparation and acceptance by understanding their college and career objectives and goals (ASCA, 2019). The next difficulty is retaining African American males in college until they graduate. It is vital to figure out how to

keep them going, guide their paths, and proceed beyond matriculation (Eliason & Turalba, 2019; Simmons, 2019).

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

All of the participants defied the impact of the racism inherent in the nation's educational system that perpetuates pre-college barriers that affect African American males' enrollment, retention, and graduation in higher education (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Broomes, 2016; Harper, 2015; and NCES, 2017). Since college attendance is either encouraged or discouraged in high schools, the academic and occupational choices of students from minority backgrounds determine their success (Huerta et al., 2018; Simmons, 2017; Rios, 2021). Most participants discussed how their high schools influenced them to enroll in college. These African American males were motivated by messages about avoiding the typical cultural traps and prejudices many minority males encounter.

The identified themes of my research also support how the social experiences of African American males also influence their persistence in college (Baker et al., 2020, 2021; Goings, 2016, 2018; Harper, 2012; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Preston & Palmer, 2018; Shappie & Debb, 2019). Participants demonstrated how African American males have persevered in higher education despite prejudices and societal challenges. Participants in their study talked about their encounters with stereotypes, how they dealt with them, how those encounters informed their future endeavors, and how they employed tactics to dispel prejudices and persevere in the face of frightening situations (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Desombre et al., 2018; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Limitations and Delimitations

There were several challenges and barriers to overcome in this study. The population sample included African American males attending an HBCU dedicated to the degree attainment

of minority male students. Contact with the participants was initially problematic because I needed to identify the best contact with campus personnel and relationships with students willing to participate in my study. I could not get responses from several campus administrators but was eventually connected to one who singlehandedly identified more than enough participants.

Secondly, once I obtained IRB approval, there were less than three weeks left in the semester to conduct my research. Therefore, the participating seniors were focused more on completing outstanding assignments to graduate, and underclassmen concentrated on their upcoming final exams. Both are understandable. This study only explored the college experiences of African American males in one HBCU, not other types of postsecondary institutions.

Recommendations for Future Research

This section proposes recommendations for future avenues of research indicated by the findings and conclusions of this study. Because of the significant gap in research on this target population, my study served to add research on college experiences for African American males, and these recommendations will suggest ways to increase the persistence of African American males in higher education.

1. The purpose of this study was to understand the African American males lived experiences while enrolled in an HBCU. A longitudinal study that connected high school, middle school, and elementary school students' perspectives to connect all educational experiences may provide more continuity.

2. This study solely reviewed African American men's perspectives. A study comparing female perspectives will contribute to closing the gap in the African American experience as a whole.

3. A research study assessing and comparing engagement in social and academic activities among various minority groups.

Conclusion

Like other populations, the academic and career choices made by African American determines their success. However, the racism inherent in our nation's educational system reinforces pre-college barriers that prevent African American males from enrolling, remaining, and graduating from college. Most participants talked about how their high schools influenced their decision to attend college. School counselors can help students thrive in college by providing information on programs and services. Exposure to college and school counselors can help African American males succeed in college by offering information on programs and services, as well as exposure to college and scholarship options.

Although the academic achievement gap and levels of academic accomplishment for students of color graduating from high school and college remain much lower than for White students, my research shows how African American males' social experiences influence their college persistence. Participants highlighted how, despite prejudice, they succeeded in higher education. Messages about avoiding the typical societal traps and biases many African American males face encouraged them to succeed in school.

The historical disparities between African American boys' educational experiences and those of other groups have been laced with racism and its political application, obstructing educational and healthcare reform alternatives that could enhance their trajectories. It's vital to discover how to keep them going, direct their paths, and get them through matriculation. The next task is to retain African American males in college until they finish their degrees.

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APPENDIX A: LIBERTY UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 6, 2022

Jill Ellis
Ellen Ziegler

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY21-22-483 A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY TO UNDERSTAND THE PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AT A HISTORICALLY BLACK LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

Dear Jill Ellis, Ellen Ziegler,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: April 6, 2022. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: SCREENING SURVEY

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences that contributed to the persistence of African American males at the nation's only historically Black college for males. This survey is designed to determine your eligibility to participate in the study.

1. Are you 18 or older? Yes/No

2. Would you like to participate in the research study about the experiences to understand the persistence of African American males at the nation's only historically Black college for males? Yes/No

3. Are you willing to participate in both an individual interview and a virtual focus group and share your experiences that contributed to your enrollment and retention at the nation's only historically Black college for males? Yes/No

4. Contact information (please print)

Email Address: _____
(Please print)

Mobile/Cell Number: _____

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Student:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting a research project at Morehouse College to meet the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences that contributed to the persistence of African American males at the nation's only historically Black college for males. I am requesting your assistance with and participation in my study.

To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, be a male student, identify as African American, and be actively working towards completing a bachelor's degree. Participants will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, participate in a one-on-one interview via Teams, participate in a focus group, and review transcripts of your interview and focus group input to check for clarity. It should take approximately two hours for you to complete all of the procedures listed. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

A consent form will be sent to you via email to complete and return to the researcher if you meet participation criteria. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Once the consent form is signed and returned, you will be contacted to schedule an interview. I sincerely appreciate your consideration to participate in this study, and I look forward to collaborating with you and learning about your experience.

Participants will receive a cash gift of their choice for meals for participation in both semi-structured interviews and focus groups. If you have any questions before choosing to participate in the study, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Jill Triplett Ellis
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: A Transcendental Phenomenology to Understand the Persistence of African American Males at a Historically Black Liberal Arts College

Primary researcher: Jill Ellis, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, be a male student, identify as African American, and be actively working towards completing a bachelor's degree. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand the persistence of African American males at the nation's only historically Black college for males. For this study, persistence is defined as the fall-to-fall retention of African American males in college.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview via Teams. All interviews will be recorded. This will be the primary source of data collection. A minimum of 15 students will be selected. Also, focus groups, ranging from 60 to 90 min, with two groups of six students.
2. You will be asked to participate in a focus group of five students. The focus groups will be 60-90 minutes and recorded.
3. You will be asked to review the interview and focus group transcriptions for accuracy. The estimated time is 10-60 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants will receive a gift card for participation in both the semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

The study will benefit the research on the persistence of African American males in higher education, particularly first-generation students attending a predominantly White institution.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks associated with this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted via Teams in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and a lockbox. The data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all physical records will be shredded.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be given \$25 gift cards for meals for participation in the study. The researcher will deliver the gift card to you in person after the completion of the study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jill Ellis. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Ellen Ziegler, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations.

The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio- and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Participant's Printed Name _____

Participant's Signature _____ **Date** _____

APPENDIX E: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this study is to understand the persistence of African American males at a historically Black college. This questionnaire is designed to capture demographic and descriptive information.

General Questions	
Date of interview	
Time of Interview	
Location	
Interviewer	Jill Triplett Ellis
Interviewee	
Demographic Questions	
Name	
Age	
Gender	
Status as Student	Full-time or Part-time
Current number of Earned Credit Hours	
Current Grade Point Average/Index	
Did Your Biological Mother Attend College? If So, Did She Graduate? If So, Was It A 2 Year Or 4 Year Program?	
Did Your Biological Father Attend College? If So, Did He Graduate? If So, Was It A 2 Year Or 4 Year Program?	
Employed? (Y/N)	Full-time or Part-time
Financial Aid	
Amount	

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE

An interview guide will be provided before each individual interview is conducted.

Central Research Question

What are the persistent experiences of African American males enrolled at a historically Black liberal arts college (HBCU)?

Sub-Question One

What personal factors contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants enrolled at an HBCU?

Sub-Question Two

What social experiences contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants enrolled at an HBCU?

Sub-Question Three

What institutional experiences contributed to the persistence experiences of the African American male participants enrolled at an HBCU?

Interview Questions

College selection

1. Would you please introduce yourself by stating your name, classification, major, and home state?
2. What are the three main factors that contributed to you enrolling in college? *CRQ*
3. What are the three main factors contributing to your selection of Morehouse College?
CRQ

College engagement

4. How have you connected with faculty, staff, and other students? *SQI*
5. How have student activities contributed to you remaining enrolled at Morehouse? *SQI*
6. How has your participation in student activities influenced your decision to remain enrolled? *SQI*

General reflection on college experience

7. What are your top three reasons for staying at Morehouse College? *SQ2*
8. How would you describe your academic and social success at Morehouse College? *SQ2*

Reflection on college experience as African American Male

9. How can academic and social success for African American male students be improved at Morehouse College? *CRQ*
10. What are the most effective forms of communication to ensure the participation of students in campus activities? *SQ1*

Focus Group Questions

1. What specific experiences at Morehouse College contributed to your success? *CRQ*
2. What are some of the advantages of attending Morehouse College? *SQ2*
3. What are some of the disadvantages of attending Morehouse College? *SQ2*
4. How does social interaction with other students contribute to your remaining enrolled at Morehouse College? *SQ1*
5. How does social interaction with faculty contribute to you remaining enrolled at Morehouse College? *SQ1*
6. What does Morehouse College provide that has contributed to you remaining enrolled? *SQ1*
7. What specific experiences have contributed to your satisfaction at Morehouse College? *SQ2*
8. What particular experiences have contributed to your intention to return to Morehouse College? *SQ2*

APPENDIX G: CODING**Initial Codes**

1. Ingrained in Family
2. Future opportunities
3. Brotherhood
4. Legacy
5. Need it for career goals
6. Defy stereotypes of Black men
7. Family
8. Support Systems
9. Motivation
10. Friends
11. Teacher
12. Encourage
13. Parental Support
14. Mentors
15. Role models
16. Academic success
17. Academic
18. Academic support
19. Graduated
20. College student
21. College

22. Leadership
23. Leadership opportunities
24. COVID
25. Pandemic
26. HBCU
27. Predominantly White College University
28. Race
29. Adversity
30. Racism
31. Resilience
32. Successful
33. Representation
34. Identity
35. Pride
36. Expectations
37. School Support
38. Clubs and Organizations
39. Community
40. GPA
41. Money
42. Scholarships
43. Social media
44. Goal as a child to attend college

45. Personal development
46. Bridge to life
47. Obtain more skills
48. Career opportunities
49. Have fun
50. Play sports
51. Personal aspirations
52. Financial aid
53. Opportunity
54. Academic excellence
55. Workforce
56. Friends
57. Relationships
58. Improve finances
59. Ambitious
60. Other colleges close
61. Culture
62. Campus events
63. Organizations
64. Majors
65. Support
66. Development
67. Respectable

68. Advocacy
69. Intellectually challenging
70. Faculty
71. Success
72. Fraternity
73. Connections
74. Conversations
75. Potential
76. Positive
77. Internships
78. Jobs
79. Virtual instruction
80. Leaders
81. Participate
82. Giving
83. Exhausted
84. Self-doubt
85. School climate

APPENDIX H: AUDIT TRAIL

Date	Entry
04/06/22	Received IRB approval
04/06/22	Sent recruitment email seeking participants.
04/08/22	Received responses from participants.
04/08/22	Received signed consent letters from participants via DocuSign.
04/15/22	Completed signed consent letters via from participants via DocuSign.
04/09/22	Conducted <i>Demographic Survey</i> via Survey Monkey.
04/15/22	Completed <i>Demographic Survey</i> via Survey Monkey.
04/14/22	Began conducting video recorded face-to-face interviews with selected participants via Teams.
04/15/22	Concluded audio recorded face-to-face interviews with all selected participants.
04/24/22	After I completed each interview, I began transcribing them using Teams and distributed those transcriptions to each corresponding participant for member-checking.
04/18/22	Conducted an audio and video recorded focus group with selected participants.
04/25/22	After I completed each focus group, I began transcribing them using Teams and distributed those transcriptions to each corresponding participant for member-checking.
05/07/22	Reviewed all interview transcriptions for coding and thematic development.
04/13/22	Maintained a <i>Reflective Journal</i>
04/26/22	Retrieved and analyzed institutional <i>Senior Survey</i>

APPENDIX I: OTHER DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

1. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants and recorded via Teams.
2. Demographic data were collected on all participants.
3. Survey monkey was used to collect the questionnaire data.
4. Common themes were vetted with participants and additional analysts for accuracy.

APPENDIX J: BUDGET

Activity	Fall 2021	Winter 2022	Spring 2022	Summer 2022	Expense	Cost
Finish coursework						
Proposal draft						
Interview potential committee members						
Literature review					Books and copies	\$374
Construct data collection methods						
Pilot					Incentives for students	\$325
Complete changes						
Data collection						
Analysis						
References						
Write-up						
Proofreading						
Binding					10 copies/bound	\$500
Miscellaneous						\$300