

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION BLACK MALE GRADUATES
WHO PARTICIPATED IN A BLACK MALE INITIATIVE PROGRAM

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of first-generation Black male graduates who participated in a Black male initiative in the Southeast region of the United States. The theory guiding this study is Astin's theory of student involvement. In support of the theory guiding this study, the central research question for the study is What are the lived experiences of first-generation Black male college graduates who participated in Black male initiatives? This research study will utilize the phenomenological design, which will consist of 10-12 first-generation Black male graduates who were involved in a Black male initiative program. This study will take place in the Southeastern region of the United States since the participants will participate in this study virtually. Data collection for this study will consist of one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and an artifact reflection. I will complete the analysis approach by utilizing the Moustakas phenomenological analysis methods such as Epoche, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variations.

Keywords: first-generation, Black males, graduation, Black male initiatives,

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my Creator and Sustainer, who allows me to experience Grace and Mercy each day!

To the memory of my mother Demetrius Mims and Father Lawrence (LJ) Brockington, who believed in me since day one and always encouraged me to never settle for anything less than the best.

To my grandfather, Dave Mims Jr., and the memory of my grandmother Zelma Mims your tenacity and love for Christ and Family have allowed me to become the gentleman I am today.

To my spouse Melissa Theodore-Bryant, who has been my support system through life's most difficult challenges and during this research process.

To my little big brother Jaye L. Brockington, who pushes me to be the best I can be in every aspect of my life and reminds me daily of the values and morals our parents have instilled in us.

To my children, Bailey Joseph and Micah Ra'Hyim, may you grasp the thirst for knowledge and value every life lesson I have taught you, but most importantly, apply it to your everyday lives.

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List of Abbreviations

Black Male Initiatives (BMIs)

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Diverse Male Student initiative (DMSI)

My Brother's Keeper (MBK)

First-Generation College Student (FGCS)

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Low-Income (LI)

Howard Purpose Respect Integrity Determination Excellence (Howard P.R.I.D.E.)

Historical White Institutions (HWIs)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Researchers have examined academic persistence for various ethnic groups elaborating on the success of students throughout the world. However, for quite some time, African Americans have struggled with academic persistence in post-secondary education. Studies often examine the persistence of the African-American race as a whole. This particular study examined the academic persistence of first-generation Black males and what contributes to student persistence throughout college. Black males experience high levels of underachievement in higher education when compared to other races and gender groups (Brooms, 2019). National data has shown that 34% of Black males graduate from four-year higher education institutions over a six-year period, which signifies Black males have the lowest degree attainment for all genders and races (NCES, 2019). The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to examine the lived experiences of first-generation Black male graduates who have participated in a Black male initiative program. Chapter one will provide a substantial overview of the background, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, and definitions. The goal of this study is to highlight the important role Black male initiatives have played in the lives of first-generation Black males as they persisted throughout college.

Background

Based on the literature that is present, Black males experience challenges of all kinds, from applying to college until graduating college. Challenges being present from the beginning allow them to be present throughout their entire college experience as a Black male. With these challenges forever being present, we continue to notice the decline in the persistence rate for first-generation Black males in higher education. The purpose of this transcendental

phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black male college graduates who participated in a Black male initiative. Due to the ongoing discriminatory characteristics, which degrade the Black race and propose challenges for Black male students who are looking to better themselves through education as an alternative option (Harper, 2009). The literature shows the importance of education, but the literature also highlights the challenges first-generation Black males may face while earning their degrees. In this section, three contexts will be addressed: the historical context as to how this topic has evolved, the social context of how it impacts the specific population and society, and the theoretical context that addresses current and future research.

Historical Context

Universities are not level playing fields where all students have an equal opportunity to participate and succeed (Barber et al., 2020). From the historical context, education has been an environment that has always provided people of color with a challenging experience. Although the experience of accessing education has been a challenge, African Americans have traditionally linked their educational pursuits to a sense of liberation and a desire to improve the plight of their people (Perry, 2003). In the year 1890, one third of the Black children were enrolled in schools (White & Cones, 1999). Black students dealt with segregation in the classroom and community, starting with *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), a case that supported segregation laws in public facilities if laws were equal in quality. This led to the brewing development of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), institutions designed to provide Black students with post-secondary education. HBCUs were an alternative route for Blacks who were denied admission into predominantly White institutions (PWIs), and they were used for African Americans to pursue their proclivity for education after the Civil War (Allen et

al., 2007). However, *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 ended, which resulted in separate but equal being dismissed, but segregation continued in the classroom. Although segregation was ended in 1954 by laws put into place, still today, Black males in higher education continue to face many sociocultural, academic, and negative stressors that impact their identity development relationships, self-awareness, and self-understanding for Black males in college (Brooms & Davis, 2017). These negative stressors continue to serve as a major influence on those who do not successfully earn their college degree.

Social Context

Barriers that have been identified by researchers deal with the social aspect of students as they matriculate in their studies. The sense of belonging to a college community is crucial for Black male students because they are now transitioning to a foreign environment. If we reflect on the history of this, *Plessy v. Ferguson* supported segregation, but *Brown v. Board of Education* stopped segregation. Therefore, Black male students are entering predominantly White institutions that are centered and focused around White students. First-generation students receive less support throughout their college experience and decision-making in college because there is a lack of resources provided for first-generation students starting with the support of family (Hines et al., 2020). Due to the lack of family support, Black male first-generation students begin to experience an overwhelming sense of pressure, apprehension, and a great deal of ignorance regarding what the college experience entails (Hines et al., 2020). Belonging to a campus community will assist Black male students who are first-generation with adjusting to the campus. A sense of belonging is shaped by the social spaces and contexts in which one engages, such as classrooms, residence halls, and academic departments (Strayhorn, 2018). The student's college experience is improved by offering resources and services that promote academic success

for Black male students. A student college experience is centered around the opportunity to belong to something of value, being a part of an organization with values that motivate and encourage Black male students to overlook any existing barriers (Strayhorn, 2018). In an effort to be a part of a supportive college community, students should be willing to engage socially, manage time, work independently and efficiently, and display strong interpersonal and social skills (Hines et al., 2020).

Theoretical Context

Astin's theory of student involvement is the theory that examines the study to understand the purpose of involvement for first-generation Black male college students who struggle with completing their academic studies. Previous studies have highlighted the challenges faced by Black male students due to unpreparedness. Tinto's (1975) theory has provided the opportunity for Black male initiatives to be created because it speaks of both academic and social integration for students. Tinto (1975) allows Black male students to integrate into these particular communities to identify support; however, this theory focuses on integration which does not address the end results of completion, persistence, and retention. Harper's (2010) anti-deficit achievement framework is a framework that focuses on closing the racial gap for male students of color in underrepresented fields. Harper's (2010) theory examines the success and challenges of minority male students when it comes to STEM-related courses and majors. This study looks at the overall completion success of first-generation Black males who graduate with the assistance of being involved in a Black male initiative.

Delgado et al., (2017) describe critical race theory as a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power. Derrick Bell, the primary theorist of CRT, highlights the notion of racial realism, the idea that racial

prejudice is so deeply ingrained in society's structures that African Americans must resign themselves to its forever being a feature of the national landscape (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). The numerous challenges that are present cause Black males to struggle with the cultural mismatch between their background and college culture, making this an even more challenging experience (Hines et al., 2020). The barriers Black males face play a significant role in student persistence and graduation rates. However, Astin's (1999) theory of involvement focuses on how to overcome those obstacles by promoting student involvement.

Problem Statement

The problem in this study is the low persistence rate for first-generation Black males in higher education (Brooms, 2019; Brooms, 2018; Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Hall, 2017; Harper, 2012; Harris, 2018). According to Hall (2017), the abysmal graduation rates of Black males is the result of (a) diminished long-term wealth accumulation, (b) greater income disparities among race and/or education level, and (c) diminishing of the nation's overall intellectual capital and global competitiveness. Adams and McBrayer (2020) believe first-generation college students share a common set of needs and challenges, such as they are more likely to come from low-income families, identify as a racial minority, are less prepared academically for college, report more feelings of marginalization, and experience greater cultural differences. Due to these challenges (Hall, 2017), negative labels about Black men create obstacles for these students to find the necessary faculty or staff for support. The ongoing problem of enrollment retention for Black males continues to occur at post-secondary institutions that have not developed a strategic plan to address the barriers faced by these students. Black men are likely to attend schools with lower graduation rates, fewer rigorous courses, and limited exposure to student-centered learning environments (Hines et al., 2019). Black men who continue to pursue the opportunity of earning

a post-secondary degree are faced with barriers. The numerous barriers cause Black males to struggle with a cultural mismatch between their background and college culture, making this an even more challenging experience (Hines et al., 2020). The barriers faced by Black males play a significant role in the student's persistence and graduation rate.

Hall (2017) states more Black and Hispanic male students are entering institutions of higher learning, which demands the establishment of effective strategies to increase not only access but their graduation rates. Although first-generation Black male students are enrolling at post-secondary institutions, they are struggling to graduate. Some students may leave college due to grades or finances; others may leave for different reasons (Kniess et al., 2020). Institutions of higher learning must develop initiatives and programs to support Black male students. Utilizing support programs such as Black male initiatives will enhance the student learning experience, promote student engagement, and provide a sense of belonging within a brotherhood. Black Male initiatives include programs and activities geared toward supporting Black male students, and often other males of color, in retention and successful matriculation through college (Brooms, 2018). Cuyjet (2006) highlights that BMI programs have been developed throughout institutions to speak to and address the needs of Black male students. Without support programs or initiatives, we will continue to deal with the problem of first-generation Black males struggling to persist in higher education.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black male college graduates who participated in Black male initiatives. At this stage in the research, the central phenomenon deals with the academic persistence of first-generation Black male students. The theory guiding this study is Astin's

(1999) theory of involvement. Astin's theory of involvement focuses on the student, which highlights the motivation of students and the time and energy devoted by students to their studies. The theory of involvement focuses on the outcomes and results of students being involved in their studies in several different capacities. Astin's theory of involvement allows the researcher to highlight the student's experiences of being involved in a Black male initiative while persisting through college.

Significance of the Study

Education is an essential tool for human beings of all races and ethnicity to pursue a successful life. For first-generation Black male students, this is nearly impossible due to the several barriers that are faced during their college experience. The goal of this study is to contribute to research by addressing the low graduation rates for first-generation Black male college students. The importance of this study is to examine the academic graduation rates for first-generation Black male students who have participated in Black male initiatives. Participants will identify as Black males who have completed college and are considered first-generation students. This study will add to the body of literature by expanding the field of research concerning Black male college student engagement in BMIs and by addressing the improvement of student graduation rates through Astin's (1999) theory of involvement. This study will highlight the important role Black male initiatives and support programs play for first-generation Black male students. Acknowledging support programs for Black male students will lead to adding a positive perspective of Black male college completion in the literature. Through lived experiences, this phenomenological study will provide first-generation Black male graduates the opportunity to share their college experience and perception through several data collection methods.

The empirical significance of this study will contribute to current and future research by addressing the gap between first-generation Black male students who are struggling to graduate due to the lack of support throughout their academic studies. Literature supports the experiences of Black male students as students in general but not as first-generation students who have participated in a Black male initiative. Brooms (2018) acknowledges that several institutions have created Black male-centered programs as an intervention method to support students' academic success and social integration, and personal development. Barker and Avery (2012) institutions are able to address the academic and social integration for Black male students by establishing peer support and same-race programs that promote Black male engagement within the institution. Brown (2006) highlights the importance of representation for Black males; seeing administrations, faculty, and staff that resemble them will enhance the environment for African-American males. A successful study exploring the lived experiences of Black male students in college will improve student retention and graduation rates and increase awareness of the community of first-generation Black male college students. For Black male college students, organizations such as Black male initiatives could be used as a buffer against alienation and isolation (Brooms, 2018). Student organizations and cultural-based initiatives allow Black males to explore their identity through involvement which has a positive influence on the student's experience (Barker & Avery, 2012). This study will identify the resources provided by colleges and universities to help students succeed. Academic and social support programs have been implemented to assist first-generation students in overcoming present barriers.

The practical perspective of this study will provide an influential perspective to institutions that may struggle to address the needs of first-generation Black male college students and who may not offer supportive services such as Black male initiatives to support these

students. The knowledge gathered from this study will improve current Black male initiatives, assist institutions with developing BMIs, and encourage institutions to support this specific population of students beyond the classroom and fill the gap for Black male students who struggle with completion. Black male initiative (BMI) programs are established to improve Black male student retention and graduation (Brooms, 2018). On a larger scale, there should be an improvement in graduation rates of first-generation Black males who attend colleges and universities that will and have incorporated the BMI models.

Research Questions

The central research question that will guide this study examines the ability of a student to persist in earning a degree as a first-generation Black male student. First-generation Black males who actively participated in a Black male initiative will be able to provide meaning as to how the BMI contributes to their academic success. Brooms (2018) states the goal is to learn what these students experience in a Black male initiative and what their experience means to their overall college effort. Black males face a number of troubles in higher education; many of these struggles (re)position them as outsiders on campus primarily because of the continued anti-Blackness that they face (Brooms, 2018). Campus engagement and involvement create attachment and a sense of belonging for first-generation Black males (Brown, 2006). Ethnic organization, which promotes campus involvement, can assist students' adjustment to college by engaging their cultural backgrounds, offering an important social involvement, and helping students connect with peers, faculty, and staff from similar backgrounds and advocating for their community (Museus, 2008). First-generation Black male students who engage in fraternal membership and participate in ethnic/cultural student organizations such as Black male initiatives have been shown to support positive social and academic integration for this specific

group of students (Guiffrida, 2003). Brooms (2018) believes these groups can assist first-generation Black males in navigating college between their peers, faculty, staff, and the campus community.

Central Question

What are the lived experiences of first-generation Black male college graduates who participated in Black male initiatives?

Sub-Question One

What role did engagement such as Black male initiative play in handling challenges as a first-generation Black male who completed their post-secondary education?

Sub-Question Two

What role did the Black Male Initiative play in your academic experience as a first-generation Black male?

Sub-Question Three

How did pre-collegiate experience and involvement help you with selecting your college or university?

Definitions

1. *Black Male Initiative Programs*—programs that enhance students' sense of mattering and belonging on campus by helping them access sociocultural capital, providing holistic support, focusing on Black male identities, and engendering students' persistence (Brooms, 2018).
2. *Critical Race Theory*—a practice of interrogating the role of race and racism in society that emerged in the legal academy and spread to other fields of scholarship (George, 2021).

3. *First-Generation College Student*—(A) An individual both of whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree; or (B) In the case of any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).
4. *Low-Income Individual*—An individual from a family whose taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of an amount equal to the poverty level determined by using criteria of poverty established by the Bureau of the Census (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).
5. *Mentoring*—a protected relationship that supports learning and experimentation and helps individuals develop their potential (University of Southampton, n.d.).
6. *Persistence*—continued enrollment (or degree completion) at any institution (Center, N.S.C.R., 2020).
7. *Predominantly White Institutions*—describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Brown & Dancy, 2010).
8. *Racism*—the marginalization or oppression of people of color based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy that privileges White people (ADL, 2020).
9. *Sense of Belonging*—centered on gaining acceptance, attention, and support from members of the group as well as providing the same attention to other members (Cherry, 2021).

Summary

This research study focused on the lived experiences of first-generation Black males who have graduated and participated in a Black male initiative program. The problem in this study is the low persistence rate for first-generation Black males in higher education. Black male initiative programs have been an essential building block in providing community support for students matriculating through college. Black male initiatives are considered vital social networks and cultural communities for helping to support students' academic and social integration on campus and their personal development (Brooms, 2019). Although Black male initiatives have been launched as a strategic initiative to promote retention (Brooms, 2019), in this study, the researcher desired to see the impact BMIs have on increasing graduation rates for first-generation Black males. The college experience for a student is centered around the opportunity to belong to something of value, being a part of an organization with value (Strayhorn, 2018). The involvement theory (Astin, 1999) has argued that increased student involvement on campus will result in better academic performance. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black males who have participated in a BMI and graduated.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter Two of this study consists of a review of current literature that relates to the chosen topic of first-generation Black men who were able to graduate with the help of a Black male initiative program. The literature selected examines the following major topics of the study: first-generation college students, Black males, barriers such as a sense of belonging, and support groups such as Black Male Initiatives (BMIs). Through literature, the researcher will support each main topic by identifying trends throughout the readings. The study will utilize Astin's theory of involvement to understand the Black male college experience as it relates to graduating college. The literature will identify trends that are in support of Black males as they overcome barriers and receive support during their collegiate journey. Chapter Two consists of an overview of the theoretical framework related to the literature surrounding the study of first-generation Black male graduates who have participated in a BMI program and concludes with a summary that identifies the gap in the literature.

Theoretical Framework

Astin's theory of involvement will serve as the primary foundation for this study, which provided a significant level of understanding for exploring the experiences of first-generation Black male students. Through involvement, we can see the number of times students are willing to dedicate themselves throughout their academic journey. Student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience (Astin, 1999). Particularly, Astin's theory of involvement is used to examine the impact college has on student learning and personal growth (Harper & Quaye, 2015. Astin (1984) supports the need for students to be involved throughout their academic experience to reach their maximum

potential. Astin (1999) argues if students are more likely to get involved in the college experience, then students are likely to experience growth in personal development, learning, and satisfaction with college. With the support of Astin's theory guiding this study, it will highlight the importance of being involved on campus through participation in academics and extracurricular activities. Ultimately, if students are involved on campus, then they have a higher chance of achieving success and completing college. Astin's theory of involvement promotes and encourages students to spend time on campus because it increases the likelihood that students will interact in positive ways with their peers, as well as faculty and staff (Harper & Quaye, 2015).

The goal of this study is to capitalize on the experience of Black males who are first-generation and have participated in male initiatives that required them to participate actively in on-campus initiatives. When campus involvement is promoted for groups such as Black first-generation male students, there is an increased likelihood of seeing academic success and on-campus representation for these students (Harper & Quaye, 2015). Astin (1999) believes students who are less involved will neglect their studies, spend less time on campus, abstain from extracurricular activities, and will not communicate properly with faculty and staff members (Astin, 1999). The theory of involvement highlights the success stories of participants in this study because it shows that these students were able to overcome barriers as Black male, first-generation students through the help of being involved in a male initiative program. Additionally, this theory provides educators the opportunity to focus on the students and the needs of the students, and the results that are produced by the students. The theory of student involvement encourages educators to focus less on what they do and more on what the student

does: how motivated the student is and how much time and energy the student devotes to the learning process (Astin, 1999).

Astin's theory of involvement is important to this study because it brings attention to the participants' involvement on campus and how their on-campus involvement has contributed to their success today. In addition, this theory looks at the success of first-generation Black males and male initiative programs by offering this specific population of students a chance to get involved.

Astin's theory of student involvement will be used to inform research questions and provide a framework to analyze data and report the results of your data. Astin's theory of student involvement will shape this study by examining the perspectives of first-generation Black males who graduated from post-secondary institutions while being actively involved in a Black male initiative. Astin's theory of student involvement will highlight the positive results of students who are involved throughout their academic studies. Astin (1999) believes student involvement should focus on what the student does and less on what educators and administrators may accomplish. Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement will guide this study by collecting meaningful data to support the research of first-generation Black males, and this theory will help develop sound research questions to support the purpose of encouraging student involvement to achieve degree completion. Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement is utilized in this study to show increased numbers of success for first-generation Black males who have graduated from college due to the support of a Black male initiative.

Related Literature

The related literature highlights the ongoing issues of Black male college students not persisting in earning a post-secondary education. For Black men, it remains the case that they are

continually reminded of our distress and subordination (Harper, 2009). Black men in America have long been regarded as criminals, irresponsible fathers, descendants of dysfunctional families, self-destructive drug addicts, materialistic lovers of flashy possessions, and violent rapists of White women cited by (Anderson, 2008; Gadsden & Smith, 1994; Gordon et al., 1994; Jenkins, 2006; Mandara, 2006; White & Cones, 1999). In addition, social stereotypes of an outstanding athletic competitor, performer, and gang member often lead observers to perceive Black males as uninterested in educational achievement and success in higher education (Harris, 2018). These ongoing discriminatory characteristics continue to degrade the Black race and propose challenges for Black male students looking to better themselves through education (Harper, 2009). This tool, known as education, provides opportunities for success for all races and ethnic backgrounds. Despite characteristics that have been developed to define Black males, there is still an opportunity to achieve success through the tool of education. Therefore, the way to achieve success through education is to overcome these barriers and stereotypes (Harper, 2009).

First-Generation College Students

The Higher Education Act of 1965 defines a first-generation college student (FGCS) as a student where both of their parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree; or any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree (TRiO, 2020). FGCS are students who are overrepresented by marginalized ethnic/racial groups or from low-income backgrounds (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Tate et al., 2015a). Students who have at least one parent to earn a baccalaureate degree or higher are identified as continuing-generation college students (Adams & McBrayer 2020). FGCS typically have lower levels of social integration, complete fewer credit hours, and

attain their credentials at lower rates than traditional non-FGCS students (Nunez & Cuucaro-Alamin, 1998). In addition, to the disadvantages faced by FGCS, there are deficiencies in academic integration that are present, which is evidence that indicates FGCS have difficulty navigating the social environment of the university and tend to be dissatisfied in comparison to other students (Stebleton et al., 2014). Limited involvement for FGCS in academic integration has the potential to compromise university performance among first-generation students (Katreovich & Aruguete, 2017).

For first-generation college students, enrollment in colleges and universities across the country continues to increase. In addition, colleges and universities continue to diversify their communities due to an increased presence of students who are the first in their families to pursue higher education (Adams & McBrayer, 2020). The characteristics of racially diverse campuses generally positively impact overall college satisfaction, grade point average, and intellectual and social self-confidence for all students (Ward et al., 2012). Although campuses are making diversity-related changes, first-generation college students still face greater challenges and barriers such as ethnicity, family income, and academic preparation (Winnie Ma & Shea, 2021). FGCS who are discouraged by the barriers encountered during their academic journey may lead to FGCS eliminating certain choices or goals regarding their education and future career (Winnie Ma & Shea, 2021). As for FGCS, there is a lack of social support, which impacts their college experience, parents lack the knowledge to help FGCS navigate college and career development, and FGCS receive limited support from their peers concerning college (Tate et al., 2015).

Recruitment of First-Generation College Students

Institutions of higher learning are developing effective strategies that focus on recruiting first-generation college students. First-generation college students make up approximately one-

third of the freshman population at colleges and universities (Stuber, 2011). Although institutions are recruiting more first-generation students, they are still set apart from their counterparts because of several barriers and characteristics (Adams & McBrayer, 2020). First-generation college students share a common set of needs and challenges, such as they are more likely to come from low-income families, identify as a racial minority, are less prepared academically for college, report more feelings of marginalization, and experience greater difficulties (Darling & Smith, 2007; Pratt et al., 2017). First-generation students being less prepared for post-secondary studies compared to their peers will result in FGCS not taking university classes in high school and showing lower average scores on entrance exams (Warburton et al., 2001). After enrolling in a university, FGCS are more likely to enroll in remedial coursework, are less likely to enroll in remedial coursework, are less confident in their academic abilities, and are less likely to ask for assistance from peers and faculty members (Jenkins et al., 2004).

First-generation college students experience a more problematic transition to higher education; than their peers, which means FGCS have experienced financial challenges, a lack of educational motivation, and lower academic and social engagement in school (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Creating an effective learning environment for first-generation students requires institutional commitment, a culture of improvement, and action orientation (Ward et al., 2012). The opportunity to create an effective learning environment will increase the chances of FGCS taking advantage of the resources available throughout the college community (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Research has shown that low-income and first-generation students are less likely to be engaged in the academic and social experiences that foster success in college (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Institutions that are becoming more ethnically and racially diverse are, as a result, enrolling more first-generation students (Ward et al., 2012). Students of all races indicated

that the diversity of the campus added value to their education and helped them be more aware and accepting of people of different races and cultures (Ward et al., 2012). To assist with recruiting first-generation students, and being that most FGCS are students of color, consequently, it is important to understand how a student's race and ethnicity function in combination with first-generation status, along with knowing how the duo can impact student learning (Ward et al., 2012). First-generation college students who may lack social capital could lose opportunities to develop supportive relationships with faculty and staff, and this may result in the students becoming less engaged in their overall academic pursuits (Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

Retaining First Generation College Students

First-generation college students are the first in their families to attend college and potentially graduate from institutions of higher learning (Padgett et al., 2012; Stebleton et al., 2014). FGCS are students who exemplify characteristics of strength and resilience because they are students who cannot be overlooked due to their perseverance to overcome substantial obstacles to pursue higher education (Schelbe et al., 2019). Despite the strength and resilience exemplified by FGCSs, they are unlikely to attend college after they have graduated from high school (Pierson & Hanson, 2015). In 2010, 4.5 million FGCS were enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States (Pryor et al., 2011). FGCS makes up a significant amount of each institution's enrollment numbers, which shows that these students face different challenges and need to be compared to their peers (Pryor et al., 2011; Reid & Moore, 2008; Stebleton et al., 2014). First-generation college students who face challenges are disadvantaged as they struggle due to not having adequate resources, lack of exposure, and mentoring to prepare for college (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). When faced with obstacles, first-generation students may have few

outlets for social support since their family members often lack an understanding of the university environment (Katreovich & Aruguete, 2017). As a result of having not received adequate social support from family members, FGCS students experience depression, stress, and upset in comparison to their peers who are not first-generation students (Stebbleton et al., 2014).

According to Engle and Tinto (2008), students classified as FGCS are more likely than their peers to drop out at the end of their first year. Students who are classified as FGCS face hurdles, which lead to the possibility of withdrawing from school with loan debt and no degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008). FGCS students begin college at a disadvantage compared to their peers in terms of social support, academic expectations, academic preparation, and access to resources (Barry et al., 2009). These students are at a disadvantage; consequently, the lack of a college education defers the acquisition of desired employment, a higher socioeconomic status, and sustained financial stability (Forbus et al., 2011; Thering, 2012). Not only do these issues affect the student negatively, but also the institutions are affected because of their inability to retain students, which can have a significant financial impact on an enrollment-driven institution (McCulloh, 2020).

Black Male Students in Higher Education

Brooms (2017) notes that one of the main concerns with Black student success in college in general, and that of Black males in particular, is how they perceive and experience the campus environment. Duncan (2002) notes that Black males have shown demoralizing results in public educational and social-emotional outcomes at a higher rate than any other racial or ethnic group, which resulted in academic failure at all levels. Brooms and Davis (2017) cite how both race and gender create stressors for Black male students and how it affects their social relations as well. Most Black male students who are enrolled in college are responsible for dealing with the

challenges of being a first-generation student but also being Black and a male. Black males experience inequities in educational opportunities and a lack of access to enriching educational programs in our school systems, which have culminated in inequities in educational outcomes (Fergus et al., 2014).

Brooms and Davis (2017) states the way students experience college is complicated by the intersections of race and gender (along with other social identities) and most significant to what is revealed here, their “Blackmaleness” has the potential to narrow their educational outcomes. Black males face many socio-cultural, academic, and negative stressors that impact their identity development and relationships; self-awareness and self-understanding are critical for Black males in college (Brooms & Davis, 2017, p. 315). Black males are often faced with being falsely accused before anything takes place, which leaves a cloud of doubt, fear, and anxiety hanging over their heads. Black men routinely face suspicion, which narrows their life opportunities because they are oppressed because they are both Black and men; Black men are oppressed by gender racism (Mutua, 2006).

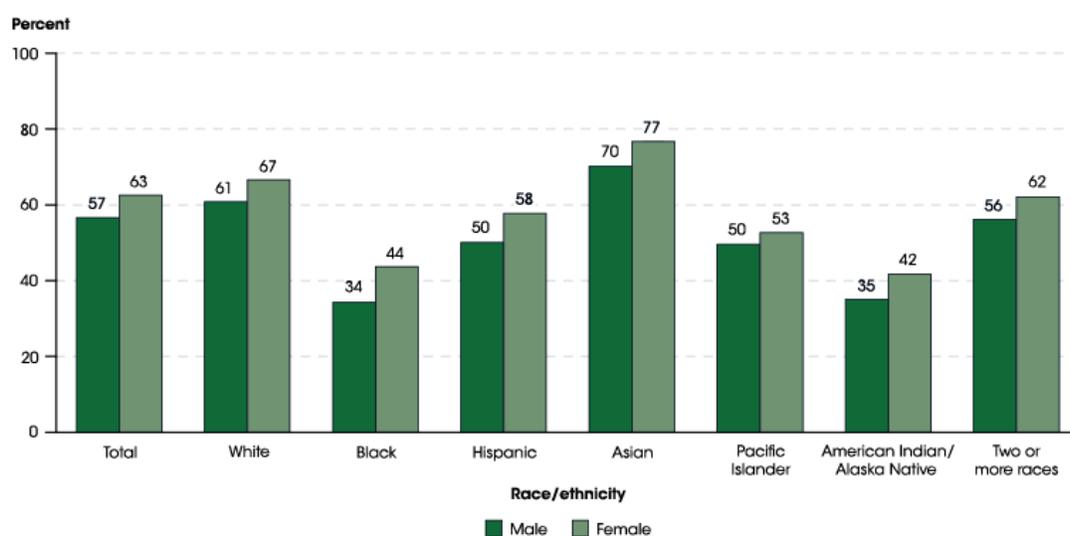
Brooms (2018) research contends that Black males face several troubles in higher education, many of which often (re)position them as outsiders on campus primarily because of the continued anti-Blackness that they face. Although institutions of higher learning are implementing diversity-based initiatives to address inclusion and equity, Black men specifically continue to face numerous troubles in higher education (Harper, 2009). Delgado (1989) suggests that, although there is not one common voice, there is a common experience of racism that structures the stories of people of color. Critical race theory allows the dominant group to utilize their voice concerning racism and their experience within education (Delgado, 1989).

Graduation Rates for Black Males in Higher Education

Black males are underrepresented at most institutions of higher learning, maintaining low academic achievement when compared to their peers (Hall, 2017). Harper (2012) noted that the six-year graduation rate for Black males attending public institutions of higher learning is 33.3% lower compared to 48.1% for students overall. Graduation rates for Black males are considered to be the lowest among racial and gender categories (Harper, 2006).

Figure 1.1

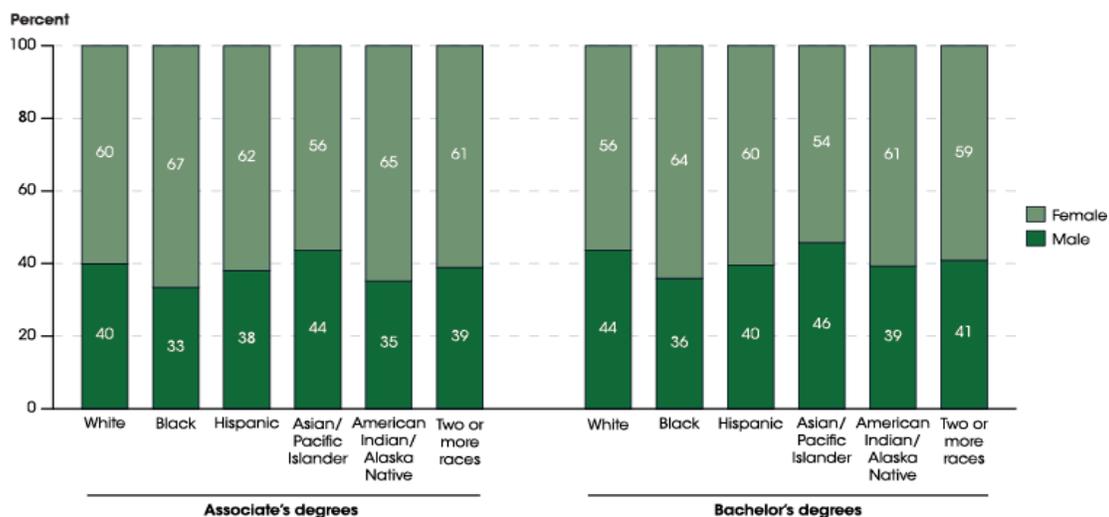
Graduation Rate Within Six Years (NCES, 2019)



In 2019 the National Center for Education Statistics reported that Black male students who received Title IV federal financial aid had a 34% completion rate, which was 10% lower than Black Females and 27% lower than their White male peers. Among all race/ethnicity groups, Blacks had a graduation completion rate of 21% in 4 years, 14% in 5 years, and 5% in 6 years, giving the Black race/ethnicity group an overall 40% completion rate, barely finishing above the American Indian/Alaska Native at 39% (NCES, 2019).

Figure 1.2

Percentage Distribution of Associate's Degrees and Bachelor's Degrees (NCES, 2019)



Based on the statistics provided by the National Center for Education Statistics, Black male students struggle to complete associate's and bachelor's degrees (NCES, 2019). For the academic year 2015–2016, only 33% of Black males completed their Associate degrees, while 36% of Black males successfully obtained their bachelor's degrees (NCES, 2019). According to the NCES (2019), Black males were less likely to complete an associate's or bachelor's degree compared to their peers in higher education. Strayhorn (2008) highlights that Black college students are attending college, progressing through, and graduating at lower rates than their non-black counterparts; this gap is especially significant in Black males, who achieve below the rates of other male students and far below their Black female counterparts. Gaps in college attainment are stagnant or increasing between blacks and whites as well as males and females (Bir & Myrick, 2015). According to Strayhorn (2008), Black females make up the majority of Black students who are enrolled at an institution of higher learning, which is two thirds of females is the majority, but two thirds of the males that are enrolled in college ultimately do not graduate. This gender gap between Black males and females is obvious at both Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Harper, 2006).

Bir and Myrick (2015) believe the poor graduation rates among Black males are the result of their poor academic achievement in high school. The lack of rigorous academic preparation before applying to college has caused barriers for Black males to complete their post-secondary degrees (Bir & Myrick, 2015). Academic success in high school is the best predictor of academic success in college and academic difficulty in college (Strayhorn, 2010). As for high school graduation rates, Black males only had a 47% report, according to Strayhorn (2010), which explains the underrepresentation of Black males in college. Therefore, students who enter college with gaps in their academic preparation, also known as developmental students, experience lower GPAs, retention rates, and graduation rates than their better-prepared counterparts (Bir & Myrick, 2015).

In addition, to the lack of high school preparation for Black males, cultural factors also have a significant impact on the success of Black males enrolled in college. Strayhorn (2008) notes that the most significant factor is negative stereotyping that can be embedded in the minds of others as well as internalized. Most Black males are recognized and celebrated in their culture when it involves hyper-masculinity, physical power, egotism, suppression of emotion and vulnerability, and quick access to money (Harper, 2006). Cultural attributes play a role in academic success for Black males; these attributes develop as a means of asserting manhood in a society where other forms of power, economic success, head-of-household status, and traditional civic involvement have historically been denied, and these attributes are generally counterproductive to achieving academic success (Cuyjet, 2006). As a result of this cultural perspective, Cuyjet (2006) labels this as psychological frailty, which is the mental construction of oneself in opposition to the mainstream, a feeling of being permanently marginalized. Cultural attributes, along with other non-common risk factors such as first-generation status and low

socioeconomic status, result in Black male students dropping out of high school or if enrolling in college, dropping out before completing a degree (Bir & Myrick, 2015). Therefore, this mindset can lead to academic failure for Black male students in college because they will often see themselves as temporary and unwelcome interlopers in higher education institutions (Bir & Myrick, 2015).

Completion for Black male students in higher education also depends on several other factors, such as their college choice of enrollment if the institution is a PWI or HBCU (Bir & Myrick, 2015). College choice makes a difference because it could contribute to important intrinsic qualities, such as personal resilience and self-efficacy (Kitsantas et al., 2008). Intrinsic qualities are compounded positively and negatively by the atmosphere in which students matriculate (Bir & Myrick, 2015). The atmosphere at a PWI for a Black male student can cause the student to feel isolated and out of place (Watson et al., 2002), lack social engagement, and perceive racism and hostility (Palmer & Young, 2010). At HBCUs, a Black male student's level of engagement and achievement increases, and there are positive psychosocial adjustments for this particular group of students, cultural awareness, increased confidence, and higher academic performance (Palmer & Young, 2010)

Barriers to Higher Education

The opportunity to prepare young men for the academic and social environment of a post-secondary institution is important, specifically for first-generation students (Hines et al., 2019). FGCS of color must cross multiple boundaries related to race and social class on predominantly white campuses (Ward et al., 2012). Barriers are present from the time a student decides to apply to college, enroll in classes, and graduate from college; understanding the application process, knowing which courses to take to prepare you for college, and personality traits are barriers cited

by Hines et al. (2019). For male students of color who are first-generation, there is a lack of support and skills given to them to be prepared academically, socially, and emotionally for college (Hines et al., 2019). First-generation students' transition into college is complex and full of confusion; first-generation college students see more barriers to successfully navigating college life: financial constraints, resentment from parents who do not have any college experience, unrealistic expectations about college life, under-preparedness for college, and social and personal worries (Ward et al., 2012).

Research shows Black males are more likely to deal with issues such as academic disengagement, underachievement, high suspension/dismissal, and low graduation rates (Kumah-Abiwu, 2019). Black male students are exposed to a range of subtle and overt stereotypical messages about their intellect, behaviors, and life expectations (Davis, 2003). Initially, to overcome these barriers, institutions must implement strategic plans that address the issues Black male students face. Harris (2018) encourages the use of university advising and counseling centers, which can help Black males with self-handicapping by designing masculine support and academic retention programs. Self-handicapping is used to avoid attributing failure to personal and internal and unchangeable factors (Harris, 2018). Harris (2018) acknowledges that self-handicapping, like self-sabotage, is a self-protective strategy that protects the individual from the acknowledgment of overwhelming and costly explanations. Black males are also faced with America's old problem of racism which is a significant force in negatively shaping the educational outcomes of Black male students (Kumah-Abiwu, 2019).

Brooms and Davis (2017) believe that early exposure to Black male college students appears to positively influence the collegiate aspirations of Black male high school students, which supports the need to focus on transitioning from high school to college and support

provided while students are enrolled in college beyond their first year. Ward et al. (2012) note that first-generation students are less likely to persist to graduation once they are in college, but the more significant problem lies in the fact that they are less likely to attend college in the first place. Research has proven for FGCS issues such as family, finances, racial/ethnic discrimination, lack of college-educated role models, and lack of preparation and/or desire to pursue an education have been identified as barriers common barriers faced by FGCS (Gibbons & Border, 2010). McCulloh (2020) believes there is an array of barriers faced by FGCSs in efforts to achieve post-secondary education, such as (a) family conflicts, (b) lack of social and/or cultural capital, (c) inadequate parental support, and (d) obligatory personal commitments. In addition to these challenges, one major barrier for FGCSs is family achievement guilt, a form of guilt that occurs when the students' family members are unable to access similar higher education opportunities (Covarrubias et al., 2014). Family achievement guilt affects a student's mental health, and higher levels of guilt may bring on symptoms of depression and even low self-efficacy (McCulloh, 2020). These difficulties may interfere with a student's ability to acquire academic and social fulfillment in college, which may eventually deter their plans to continue enrollment and complete their college degree (Gibbons & Border, 2010).

Academic and Social Integration

Academic and social integration is considered a challenge for students who do not come from a family background that consists of college graduates who are familiar with the college process (McCulloh, 2020). Scholars propose that there are two main types of institutional integration: academic integration and social integration, which influence the student's overall college experience (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). Academic integration is the transition into the academic life of the campus, such as faculty-student engagement, academic services, and a

commitment to studying (Cabrera et al., 1993). It is through academic integration that highlights a student's potential to benefit from academic experiences, which are based on that student's academic performance and intellectual development, within an educational setting (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). Overall, this requires that the student can meet the institution's educational demands and that the institution can meet the student's educational desires (Tinto, 1975.). To see positive results from academic integration, a student must put enough energy and time into learning and obtaining good grades and interacting with faculty members (Clark et al., 2014). Social integration is the students' assimilation into the social life of the campus, which consists of peer-to-peer relationships and involvement in student activities and organizations (McCulloh, 2020).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) define social integration as a student who is socially involved on a college campus and interacts with their peers. Clark et al. (2014) further explain what it means to be socially involved on campus, which includes a student developing friends, joining clubs and organizations such as the Black Student Union, Fraternities and Sororities, Athletics, and informal interactions with faculty and staff to discuss or support social issues, which highlights the struggles of student identity (e.g., LBGTQ support groups, Black Lives Matter support groups, and Black Male Initiatives). Student retention involves academic integration and social integration with faculty and peers; the distinction is usually between the contexts of those interactions; academic integration focuses on intellectual pursuits, and social integration supports emotional and psychological well-being (Clark et al., 2014). If students successfully engage in academic and social integration, their chances of being retained by the institution increase (McCulloh, 2020). However, if a student fails to engage in both academic and social integration, there is a chance for another hurdle to develop, which will derail the

individual's academic integration and social integration on campus (McCulloh, 2020). Students facing academic and social pressures may find the academic coursework stressful and overwhelming (Katreovich & Aruguete, 2017). In addition, work and family responsibilities provide additional barriers for Black male FGCS (Stebbleton & Soria, 2013).

FGCS who are charged with family and work responsibilities usually work longer hours than their peers (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Students who take on the responsibility of working and caring for family while in college struggle to make time for academic and social integration (Katreovich & Aruguete, 2017). The obligation to work leaves students with little free time, and first-generation students are less likely to engage in high-impact educational opportunities such as learning communities, service learning, and study abroad, which can assist students with overcoming the barriers faced in higher education and promote both social and academic integration (Kuh, 2008). The experiences of study abroad, service-learning, and learning communities promote academic and social integration for all students, but due to the lack of academic preparation, lack of social interaction, and work and family responsibilities, FGCS are put at a disadvantage when it comes to these opportunities (Katreovich & Aruguete, 2017).

The initial barrier for Black male students is developed from the disadvantages first-generation students have before they begin college, which leads to a retention problem for institutions of higher learning (Ward et al., 2012). To address the disadvantages, institutions should focus on intervention programs to help improve both the academic and social integration of first-generation students (Tinto, 2004). Intervention programs will assist students with overcoming obstacles and improving GPAs (Katreovich & Aruguete, 2017). However, given the low academic preparation, lack of social integration, and work and family responsibilities, Engle

and Tinto (2008) believe about one fourth (26%) of US first-generation students drop out in their first year, compared to 7% of other students. Students who develop an early understanding of academic and social integration while in high school despite being an FGCS and are involved throughout their high school career with various stakeholders are predicted to have greater success in college (Hudley et al., 2009), peer and family support predict higher grades (Dennis et al., 2005) and retention (Hudley et al., 2009). Social interactions with university personnel, such as faculty and advisors, are associated with increased confidence, a sense of belonging, and higher grades (Bers & Schuetz, 2014; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014).

Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging as it relates to college students is perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campuses such as faculty, staff, and peers (Strayhorn, 2018). A sense of belonging is shaped by the social spaces and contexts in which one engages, such as classrooms, residence halls, and academic departments (Strayhorn, 2010). A student's perceptions about their college campus, how they see themselves within the college milieu, and how the campus embraces their presence or not all matters (Brooms, 2017). FGCS students have acknowledged that there is a lack of social support when it comes to emotional, informational, and financial support from families, as non-FGCS are receiving adequate support from their families (Jenkins, 2006). Sense of belonging for a Black male at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) is threatened by the constant reinforcement of racist stereotypes that stigmatize them as dumb jocks, Black male criminals from the local community who do not belong on campus, affirmative ion beneficiaries, who were undeserving of admission, and underprepared at-risk students who all emerged from low-income families and

urban-ghettos (Harper, 2009). Sense of belonging can yield both positive (e.g., involvement, happiness, achievement, and retention) and negative (e.g., depression and decreases in health and well-being) outcomes (Brooms, 2019). A student college experience is centered around the opportunity to belong to something of value; being a part of an organization with value motivates and encourages Black male students to overlook any existing barriers (Strayhorn, 2018).

Without a doubt, campus climate and the social milieu are critical to how students experience college and how they feel that they belong or not (Brooms, 2019). One major critical factor in the retention and success of African American students at Historically White Institutions is the individual's experience of the campus social environment (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Critical race theory examines the experiences of students who have been identified as students of color and are considered to be scholars in higher education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). In efforts to assist Black male students with identifying ways to become involved in the campus community, there are support programs created (Brooms, 2019). Transitioning through college requires interaction between students and their families and extra-institutional peer networks (Ward et al., 2012). Black male students struggle to find support outside of their same-race peer groups at PWIs, and Black men need support groups to achieve high levels of satisfaction with their college experiences (Strayhorn, 2008).

Stereotypes of Black Males in Higher Education

Racial microaggressions are often manifested in the traditions and norms of our society (Hall, 2017). Threatening environments created by stereotypes can affect Black males' academic success while they are enrolled at a college or university (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018). When the

presence of Black males on college campuses is continually questioned, they often battle internal and external pressures related to their academic ability and performance in college as a result of racialized stereotypes, hindering their true intellectual ability and potential (Museus 2008; Steele, 2010; Steele & Aronson, 1995). These perceptions and experiences have a profound impact on their collegiate career across their personal, social, and academic lives (Brooms, 2017). African Americans tend to be marginalized and may be considered less intelligent when compared to their White peers (Hall, 2017). Stereotype threat situations cause Black males to experience an array of emotions and feelings, which include shock, confusion, surprise, anxiety, anger, vulnerability, or fear (Harper, 2015). As a result of these stereotype threat situations, Black males may feel the need to internalize feelings and emotions stemming from stereotype threats to seemingly ignore the situation at hand (Brittian et al., 2009).

Internalization may stem from instances of racial battle fatigue or the result of students constantly having to police others' racial ignorance (McGee & Martin, 2011). Black males encountering these stereotypes may feel the need to internalize feelings and emotions stemming from stereotype threats to seemingly ignore the situation at hand (Brittian et al., 2009). Coping strategies of internalization can lead to severe and traumatic psychological stress (Smith et al., 2007). Internalization is linked to psychological effects, including feelings of vulnerability and loneliness, which foster lower levels of self-esteem and can damage mental health (Smith et al., 2007).

These stereotypes that continue to affect Black male students give other races the notion that Black males do not care about education (Brooms, 2018). Black males are continuously stereotyped in collegiate settings while documenting how they persist (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018). Black males have consistently reported having their academic abilities and talents questioned,

negated, or attributed to affirmative action, athletics, or programs/scholarships related to their race or socioeconomic status (Harper, 2012). The stereotypes Black males face are challenges that cause trauma, such as being disproportionately represented in interactions with police officers, being heavily surveilled, and being seen as out of place or fitting the description (Smith et al., 2007). Harper (2015) notes that Black males have also reported that their White peers assumed they knew where to get drugs and how to dance, used slang terms or broken English, came from impoverished families' neighborhoods, were athletically talented, and had a scary, threatening appearance. Smith et al.'s (2007) study highlighted that in many instances when Black males were stereotyped on campus, they had feelings of confusion, resentment, anxiety, avoidance, and fear which led to a lack of sense of belonging at the institution. The emotions that Black males encounter as a result of being stereotyped and racial microaggressions have influenced their ability to perform academically and affect them socially (Smith et al., 2007).

In efforts to overcome these stereotypes and situations, higher education professionals have developed specialized programs, orientations, and campus/community groups/organizations (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018). Although higher education professionals have developed initiatives to address the stereotypes, the experiences of Black males in college continually show lower levels of engagement (Harper, 2006). While scholars have examined the ongoing issue of Black male students being stereotyped, they have identified key contributors to Black male social engagement, which includes peer support, mentoring, faculty interactions, and campus climate (Barker & Avery, 2012). Their persistence rates increase when they are provided with the opportunity to engage in the campus communities on social and psychological levels (Astin, 1984). According to Harper (2006), peer support was an indicator of success among Black male college students. Harper (2006) notes that peers provide Black male college students with

leverage and support in times of need, advancement, and achievement in their collegiate endeavors despite the stereotypes they face. Furthermore, faculty, staff members, administrators, and university departments/centers have a significant impact on Black male college students because these contributors have been utilized to counteract some of the burdens stereotypes play in the advancement and achievement of Black males in college (Barker & Avery, 2012).

Student Support Services

Institutions are now developing support programs to address the needs of Black male college students who may struggle with adapting and adjusting to the college community. Adams and McBrayer (2020) state that several academic and social support programs have been implemented to assist first-generation students in overcoming some of these challenges and aiding in persisting to graduation. Research shows that a high level of support, especially in the first year, predicts successful outcomes among first-generation students (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Institutions recognize the distinct and growing needs of FGCS and have developed programs that support retention and academic success (Schelbe et al., 2019).

Programs aimed at providing academic preparation and social support (e.g., TRiO programs) have been effective at increasing university enrollment and graduation rates (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). TRiO Programs are federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities (TRiO, 2021). Support programs such as TRiO Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services provide exposure to college students and the campus environment (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Pascarella et al. (2004) identified that FGCS derive significantly greater benefits from social integration on campus than their peers. Programs such as TRiO programs and student

support initiatives enhance students' social, cultural, and aspirational capital for college (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Brooms and Davis (2017) highlight the impact of these programs by acknowledging that these programs play a key role in furnishing students with critical academic-oriented experiences that help to increase their awareness of on-campus resources and services and provide them with a social support network on campus.

Providing support for Black male students will address the decreasing graduation and retention rates. Black male students are entering institutions of higher learning, which demands the establishment of effective strategies to increase not only access but their graduation rates (Hall, 2017). By providing support to students, you are offering the student a chance to become more engaged within the campus community. Bridge programs and campus-based initiatives like BMIs are aimed at developing preparatory academic skills and building strong social and academic support networks to retain Black male FGCS and their chances of graduating (Schelbe et al., 2019). BMI programs provide students with the opportunity to develop brotherhood and community with their peers. This community of brotherhood allows the opportunity to provide support, motivation, and encouragement through peer-to-peer interactions.

Initiatives such as Black male programming have been shown to improve Black male persistence rates as they continue to increase Black males' sense of belonging, peer support, out-of-class faculty engagement, and co-curricular involvement (Barker & Avery, 2012; Broman, 1997; Harper, 2006, 2012; LaVant et al., 1997). BMI programs share the same goal of eliminating unfair treatment and immoral practices, such as critical race theory, which is committed to a social justice agenda that will eliminate all forms of racial, gender, language, sexuality, and class subordination (Harper, 2015). The opportunity to develop programs provides institutions with the chance to mitigate the differences between first-generation Black men and

their peers are needed; however, without direct input from the target population first generation Black men, programs may not fully understand how to meet students' needs effectively, and they may not fully appreciate the relative impact specific components of these programs have on students (Schelbe et al., 2019).

Discussions on Black Male Initiatives

Black male initiatives are designed to target African American/Black men due to the ongoing underrepresentation in higher education (Fullard, 2019). The effort to improve the Black male experience and success on college campuses has led to the development of Black male initiative programs, which has caused programs to be created at many levels such as institutional, system-wide, federal, and state support, increasing retention and graduation rates of Black male collegians (Druery & Brooms, 2019). Brooms (2017) believe these programs are structured as social initiatives that foster social and academic integration into campus communities. In efforts to promote academic achievement among Black male students, President Barack Obama developed My Brother's Keeper (MBK) to address the persistent opportunity gaps boys and young men of color face and to ensure all young people can reach their full potential (MBK, 2014). The My Brother's Keeper initiative is committed to closing the education and labor force gaps (MBK, 2014). By closing the education gap, the share of working-age men with a bachelor's degree or above would double, and the total U.S. GDP would increase by 1.8% (MBK, 2014). This alliance works to unleash the power of communities working together to solve problems for boys and young men of color at a level to improve real-life outcomes (MBK, 2014). Institutions such as Howard Community College, Prince George's Community College, Florida State University, and North Carolina Central University have created a well-established initiative to promote retention, persistence, and graduation among Black male students.

Howard Community College's Purpose Respect Initiative Determination Excellence (P.R.I.D.E.) program for Black male students is a program that aims to increase the math completion, retention, and graduation rates of Black male students (Garcia, 2020). Florida State University's initiative for Black male students is aimed at assisting this specific population with their transition into both the Florida State University and the Tallahassee communities through mentoring, academic integration, leadership, service, and social integration (Florida State University, 2022). In 2015, Black male students accounted for 48.4% of a four-year graduation rate compared to their peers who identified as White males at 60.7%; as for six-year graduation rates, Black male students had a 72.5% graduation rate falling right behind their White peers who six-year graduation rate was 72.5% in 2013 (Florida State University, 2022). Prince George's Community College offers an experiential program to Black male students by helping them focus on self-improvement, community, involvement, and increasing their knowledge of social, cultural, and economic drivers (Prince George's Community College, 2020).

Institutions of higher learning, such as North Carolina Central University, have developed strategic initiatives focusing on the academic success of Black males, which is called the African American male initiative (NCCU, 2022). This specific program has helped over 600 Black males in graduating, maintained a 69.9% retention rate through the African American Male Initiative, and had an average GPA of 2.87 (NCCU, 2022). Barker and Avery (2012) found that students benefited from forming connections within the program and identifying connections between race, gender, and engagement. According to Brooms (2018), students believed that they benefited from consistent guidance and advice from the program's staff, which ultimately supported their academic pursuits. Fullard (2019) states that the mission of Black Male Initiatives at SUNY Empire State College is to increase retention and persistence through degree

completion. The opportunity to achieve this long-term goal has allowed BMIs such as the one at SUNY Empire State College and North Carolina Central University to address the issues faced by Black Males through an Afrocentric paradigm of a supportive community, inclusion, and focus on racialized people (Fullard, 2019).

Black male initiatives have evolved continuously from a peer mentoring program into a student support group that provides panel discussions, career counseling, scholarship funding, networking events, admissions outreach, fellowship, and social responsibility initiatives (Fullard, 2019). The services provided by BMIs encourage Black male students to become involved in the activities of the school, provide opportunities for networking with faculty and alumni, connect with others in the Black community, recruit Black speakers and mentors, and bring Black counselor representation into the institution (Ross et al., 2016). The BMI paradigm presented by Fullard (2019) addresses six key strategic areas: institutional commitment; diversity recruitment; academic enhancement; social/emotional programming; and culturally competent peer mentorship.

Fullard (2019) highlights the 12 separate areas of programming for BMIs: Identification of At-Risk Students, BMI Support Groups, Peer Counseling and Referrals, Outreach and Promotion, BMI Student Clubs, Student and Alumni networking, Community Forums/Events, Social Responsibility and Social Justice Initiatives, Technical Assistance for BMI Expansion, BMI-Sponsored Scholarships, Fortified/Enriched Classroom Environment, BMI Saturday Coaching Sessions, and Outcome Research on All of the Above. Black male Initiative programs serve an important role in providing avenues for Black males to gain academic and social resources needed to succeed in college (Brooks et al., 2013). In addition, black male initiatives and similar support programs provide an array of support for students such as Black

males to develop positive peer connections and chances to engage with faculty and staff (Barker & Avery, 2012). Druery and Brooms (2019) highlight that students involved in Black male initiatives will engage in purposeful events such as scheduled meetings, lecture and discussion-based workshops, retreats, student leadership conferences, community service events, and group travel events. These student-centered programs are a leading cause for students to increase their level of engagement and interaction in important conversations concerning education, career, race, class, gender, masculinity, intersectionality, spirituality, and what it means to be a Black man in America (Druery & Brooms, 2019).

Mentoring Relationships

Cullingford (2016) identifies the true objective of a mentor, which is to enable learning in others by showing an interest in the individual's life, supporting dreams, and finding ways of offering stability for their future. Purposeful interaction between African American faculty and students has proven to be invaluable in Black males' academic and social development and coping as well (Brooms & Davis, 2017). The need for mentors is extremely important because (Tolliver, 2012) characterized Black males as an "endangered species": a class of individuals at inordinately high risk for failure across virtually all life domains. Mentoring programs are developed to redress the issues of academic preparedness and fill the social voids of African American males at HWIs (Cuyjet, 2006). According to Robinson (2021), mentoring has been recognized as a powerful tool that can support efforts toward increasing social and emotional learning and connect underserved individuals with reliable human resources who can motivate students to achieve high standards.

The tool of mentoring should help close education gaps, build a foundation that allows the mentee to advance successfully in an unsympathetic environment, and teach coping skills

that decrease the loneliness experienced by young men living without a father in the home (Robinson, 2021). When Black males enter educational institutions with high levels of preparation, mentoring support, and motivational influences, they are more likely to perform at a high standard that increases the likelihood of both their academic and social success than those who are unmentored (Harper, 2015). Effective mentoring links families to the educational process in a personal way and can be instrumental in encouraging a young mind to think critically about the future (Robinson, 2021). Not only does mentoring shape and mold the young man for future success, but it provides opportunities for personal growth, motivation, social progress, emotional support, and access to academic resources that are essential to the educational experience for students of color (Brittan et al., 2009).

According to Robinson (2021), mentoring can be divided into two categories: unstructured mentoring and strategic mentoring. Unstructured mentoring is when the mentor seldom receives professional training, and there are no clear guidelines about how the mentoring relationship might proceed once it starts; strategic mentoring is a well-coordinated, high-performing mentoring process centered on enriching the life of the mentee through formal procedures that avoid the common pitfalls associated with unstructured mentoring (Robinson, 2021). Institutions of higher learning are more likely to have a strategic mentoring program in place because it creates a partnership between the mentor, the mentee, and the family of the mentee (Robinson, 2021). A well-structured mentoring relationship is key for scholastic and social success for Black males without a father in the home (Brooms & Davis, 2029).

The presence of more African American faculty and staff members in those environments will significantly enrich the campus climate by providing a source of comfort for the students (Brooms & Davis, 2017). With African American professors present, this increases the level of

engagement for Black male students, which results in positive interactions inside and outside of the classroom and helps the students adjust socially (Brooms & Davis, 2017). The general premise of mentoring programs involving both faculty and staff is to promote social-emotional growth, improve academic success, advance school retention, and motivate the mentee to high standards (Brown, 2009). The construction of the informal faculty and student relationship influences Black males' academic, social, and personal development (Hall, 2017). Brooms and Davis (2017) support the relationship between faculty and students because the majority of African American faculty members' own collegiate experiences are often like those experienced by many African American students.

Disability Support Services

Special education was mandated by law in 1975 with the passage of the education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA), now renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (Harry & Anderson, 1994). However, the underrepresentation of Black male students with learning disabilities has been an evolving barrier in American education for years. By 1965 in San Francisco, California, resistance to the court-ordered segregation initiated by the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) led to the charge that districts were using special education classes as a cover for segregation (Prasse & Reschly, 1986). As a result, African American students were placed in special education classes and labeled with specific learning disabilities to give the illusion of compliance with the law (Hing, 2015). A learning disability is a disorder in one or more basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. It may manifest in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations (NCES, 2021).

Black students with learning disabilities are more likely to be placed in self-contained or more restrictive settings than their mainstream peers and have limited access to the general education curriculum necessary for college preparation (Harry & Klingner, 2014). Perceptions of black male students' competencies have been framed by the racial undertones that stem from historical hostilities among groups (Durodoye et al., 2004). Different social markers of Black, male, and learning disability produce a matrix of domination in which Black male students with LD experience exclusion and oppression (Collins, 2000). Stereotypes are the leading cause of black male students becoming discouraged from pursuing post-secondary education.

Disability Service departments were set up to provide accommodations to students with disabilities. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the receipt of federal funding enabled Disability Service departments to be set up to provide accommodations to students with disabilities (McCleary-Jones, 2007). Nationally, students with LD in higher education encounter multiple structural and social barriers to obtaining disability support services and academic accommodations and negative attitudes (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; May & Stone, 2010). However, students with disabilities are more likely to enroll in a community college setting than in other sectors of higher education (Ma & Baum, 2016). For example, in 2017, approximately 4.5% of students were registered with disability support services in Maryland's community colleges (Fielder, 2020).

Summary

Black male students in higher education continue to face ongoing challenges as they earn baccalaureate degrees. In 1940, less than 1% of Black males earned a college degree; by 2000, approximately 10% Black men had completed college (McDaniel et al., 2011). Challenges such as being a first-generation student and a Black male have led to several stereotypical assumptions

such as gang bangers, criminals, drug addicts, etc. In addition, Black males are often disproportionately represented in interactions with police officers, are heavily surveilled, and are seen as out of place or fitting the description (Smith et al., 2007). Although these students face stereotypes because of their race and ethnicity, additional challenges must be addressed once enrolled in college. Barriers such as a sense of belonging and lack of support play a pivotal role in the student's academic experience. Literature indicates that first-generation college students, such as Black males, tend to have a lower sense of belonging and connectedness on campus than non-first-generation college students (Winnie Ma & Shea, 2021). This leads to the creation of Black Male Initiative programs and mentoring-based initiatives that encourage students to engage in the campus community and identify support within their racial groups. Black male students are engaged in Black Male Initiative programs to promote academic success, access to campus resources, and community involvement. Brooms (2017) believes that Black males in college, through their engagement in BMI programs, experience (a) a sense of belonging, (b) gaining access, (c) academic motivation, and (d) a heightened sense of self. Astin's theory of involvement, which supports the research, highlights the role student engagement plays for Black males as they persist through post-secondary education.

Based on the related literature utilized, there is a gap in the literature that does not address the positive factors that contribute to graduation rates concerning first-generation Black males. Critical race theory acknowledges the struggles of Black males concerning race, stereotypes, academic support, mentorship, and being listed as a first-generation student, but Critical race theory believes racism is normal and addresses ways in which society operates daily regarding the common experiences of people of color (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018). Astin's theory of involvement encourages a student to engage both academically and socially to achieve success

(Astin, 1999). Despite academic challenges, lack of preparation, and sense of belonging, Astin's theory of student involvement urges the student to become active in the campus community to have a more pleasant experience and achieve academic success (Astin, 1999). The rates of first-generation Black male college students continue to increase each academic year. Although the numbers are improving, there is no direct study evaluating the gap in the number of students graduating. Institutions of higher learning are offering necessary resources for first-generation college students.

In addition, Black male students who are labeled first-generation receive additional support through Black male initiative programs and faculty-to-student mentorship programs. The literature has proven there are resources available but has not proven how successful the resources are when it comes to graduating Black male college students. This phenomenological study will investigate the contributing factors that will enhance a Black male first-generation graduation experience while being involved in a Black male initiative program. Race and ethnicity play a huge factor when it comes to Black male college students persisting because of the barriers and stereotypes that are presented. For Blacks as a whole, completion rates continue to rise, but Black women is the leading reason for this cause of enrollment rise concerning completion rates (McDaniel et al., 2011). Black male college students who pursue their studies at PWIs deal with the sense of belonging by identifying ways to adjust to the campus community. For Black male college students, the BMI programs assist with these by adjusting to the campus environment and establishing life-long mentorships with faculty and staff members who resemble them. Black Male Initiative programs have served as important promoters of Black male students' collegiate success (Brooms, 2018). If students are actively engaged and receive

some form of support, then the pathway to academic success and graduation will become the focal point for first-generation Black male students.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black male college graduates who participated in Black male initiatives. Chapter Three expounds on the research design, research questions, and setting and outlines the methods used to analyze the data collected from the participants through interviews, focus groups, and artifact reflection. In addition to acknowledging the components that form the study, Chapter Three highlights the trustworthiness and ethical issues surrounding the study and concludes with a chapter summary.

Research Design

This qualitative study utilized the phenomenological approach to understand the participants' common experiences. The researcher selected the qualitative method as the appropriate method for this study because it allowed the researcher to experience the phenomenon through interaction with the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By experiencing the phenomenon, the qualitative study allowed the researcher to collect data through individual interviews, artifact reflection, and focus group interviews to highlight how to improve the problem the participants experienced. Phenomenological research is a design that has been developed out of both philosophy and psychology, which allows the researcher to describe the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher has selected the phenomenological approach for this study to highlight the lived experience of first-generation Black males who have graduated with a two-year or four-

year degree and have participated in a Black male initiative. The phenomenological approach gives the participants a chance to tell their “story” and gives the researcher their perspective firsthand. Moustakas (1994) acknowledges that phenomenology allows one to engage in an intentional experience, which incorporates real content and ideal content through thought, perception, memory, judgment, and feeling. The phenomenon of engaging in a Black male initiative as a first-generation student will allow students to comprehend the experience. This framework is appropriate for this study because it will allow students to expound upon the lived experiences of being a first-generation Black male graduate who participated in a Black male initiative. Researchers identify a phenomenon, an “object” of human experience, but van Manen (2014) describes phenomenological research as beginning “with wonder at what gives itself and how something gives itself. The foundation of a phenomenology study is developed based on the philosophical component.

Transcendental phenomenology consists of identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one’s experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Based on Moustakas’s (1994) transcendental phenomenology allowed the researcher to collect data with a fresh mindset and a new beginning. Therefore, the transcendental design gives the researcher a chance to take the participants’ perspectives through data collection from individual interviews, artifact reflections, and focus groups and contribute to both current and future research through a new perspective and fresh mindset. In addition, to providing the researcher with a fresh mindset and a new beginning, the transcendental approach gives the researcher knowledge through self-evidence (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, the phenomenon which is being studied is the experience of Black male

initiatives through the perspective of a first-generation Black male. The researcher's goal is to improve and expand the field of study by understanding the lived experience of each participant.

According to van Manen (2014), the history and purpose behind phenomenological research is a way to examine how a particular group of individuals in a certain place or institutional context have certain experiences. The phenomenological study is established to acknowledge the individuals' lived experiences; this particular approach requires the individual to have experienced the phenomenon by articulating their lived experience (van Manen, 2014). The phenomenon of Black male graduates has been explored from various perspectives (Brooms, 2018). However, the history of this concern has not explored the lived experiences of first-generation Black male graduates who have participated in a Black male initiative. Therefore, this qualitative phenomenological approach will acknowledge the phenomenon concerning the lived experiences of first-generation Black male graduates who have participated in a Black male initiative program.

Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following central research question listed below. In addition, the central research question will be supported by the two sub-questions.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of first-generation Black male college graduates who participated in Black male initiatives?

Sub-Question One

What role did engagement such as Black male initiative play in handling challenges as a first-generation Black male who completed their post-secondary education?

Sub-Question Two

What role did the Black Male Initiative play in the academic experience of first-generation Black males?

Sub-Question Three

How did pre-collegiate experience and involvement help you with selecting your college or university?

Setting and Participants

The purpose of this section is twofold. First, the purpose is to paint a site or setting picture for the reader of your dissertation in sufficient detail to visualize the setting without consuming too much time and space in the manuscript. Second, the purpose of this section is to describe the profile of your participants by articulating the criteria for participation in your study.

Setting

The setting for this study was the Southeastern region of the United States. The researcher selected this area because of his experience attending college and working in this region. Within the southeastern region of the United States, there is a large popularity of Black males who are first-generation, graduated from college, and experience several barriers while persisting through college. The southeastern region was selected for this study because it represents some of the prolific college institutions known throughout the country. It provided the researcher access to Black male college graduates who attended these intuitions and could share their lived experiences. Each participant's identity was protected using pseudonyms, and each participant graduated from college with an earned associate's or bachelor's degree. Also, institutions of higher learning will be protected by using pseudonyms. The colleges and

universities attended by the participants are led by Presidents and Chancellors but are governed by a Board of Trustees.

Participants

A requirement highlighted by Creswell and Poth (2018) is that all individuals must have stories to tell about their lived experiences. Individuals selected by using the purposeful sampling method must identify as Black males, first-generation students, and college graduates. The gentleman who participated in this study were in the 20-35 year age range, highlighting participants who had earned at least an associate's or bachelor's degree. A minimum of 10 Black males in the Southeastern region of the United States of America participate by sharing their lived experiences through artifact reflection, individual interviews, and focus groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These individuals will receive an IRB consent form explaining the process of this study and the requirements to participate. After the participants agreed and signed the consent form, the researcher kept a copy for his records and provided the participants with a copy.

Researcher Positionality

In this section, the researcher will identify an interpretive framework to assist with guiding this study. Also, the researcher will provide the readers with an overview of his philosophical assumptions and the role they play in this study. The following three assumptions will be discussed ontological, axiological, and epistemological. In addition, the researcher will elaborate on his role as the researcher and how his role has influenced him as a researcher to conduct this study.

Interpretive Framework

In this study, the researcher will utilize the social constructivism framework to guide and understand the phenomenon of first-generation Black males' experience in Black male initiatives. Social constructivists are a way for researchers to understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Social constructivism allows the researcher to rely on participants' views and look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, participants will be encouraged to expound on their perspectives of how the phenomenon has allowed them to complete undergraduate school as first-generation Black males. The participant's view is formed through interactions, which means the participants in this study will give perspectives based on their encounters as participants in a Black male initiative.

Philosophical Assumptions

The researcher elaborates on ontological, epistemological, and axiological philosophical assumptions in this section. Huff (2009) highlights the importance of philosophy in research because it provides the direction of research goals and outcomes, the scope of training and research experiences, and gives the researcher evaluative criteria for research-related decisions. Although assumptions are critical for the researcher when it comes to the perspective of philosophy, assumptions can change over time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I believe that as the research changes, the philosophical assumptions may change better to fit the phenomenon being studied. The foundation may remain the same, but the things that support the foundation may change to suit the research study better.

Ontological Assumption

Proverbs 2:6 reads, “For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding.” The ontological assumption allows the researcher to relate to nature’s reality and its characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The foundation of my beliefs starts from receiving the necessary knowledge from God almighty. When it comes to my purpose in life and research, it is my every intention to ensure my purpose aligns with God’s purpose for my life. To complete this research, I spoke with God concerning what I shall accomplish throughout this study or what problem I should address to succeed in completing this study. Proverbs 4:7 reads, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.” Therefore, as a researcher, it was imperative for me to stand on my foundation of trusting God and seek God to understand how my purpose can be fulfilled by completing this research. The nature of reality is that all knowledge comes from a higher being, and for me, that higher being is God, who gives you the knowledge and sense to study, gain wisdom, and fulfill his will. I understand that as a human being who abides by the Bible and believes in God, God’s will for our life is the reality because He is the Creator of the heavens and earth. The book of Proverbs is a book replete with wisdom and knowledge, and one of my favorite scriptures to live by is Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding; In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”

Epistemological Assumption

Creswell and Poth (2018) note that the epistemological assumption allows the researcher to get as close as possible to the participants being studied, subjective evidence is assembled based on individual views, and knowledge is known through the subjective experiences of people. Epistemology provides the researcher with the philosophical perspective of studying the

nature of knowledge and the process by which knowledge is acquired and validated (Gall et al., 2007). To better understand the knowledge through the epistemological assumption, it is recommended for the researcher to conduct studies in the field, and the longer I am able to conduct the study in this respective field, the greater the knowledge of the participants begins to play in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher's goal is to become familiar with each participant to understand how the phenomenon of being a first-generation Black male graduate has impacted his life while matriculating through college with the assistance of a Black male initiative. Firsthand, the researcher understands the knowledge from his very own perspective, but a unique perspective will be provided by each participant because they may have similar experiences, but they may have engaged in the experiences in a different way. The opportunity to become familiar with the participants during this research will increase the knowledge shared between each person engaged in this study.

Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumption highlights the value the researcher brings to a qualitative study, but in this study, I will allow my values and beliefs to be known through the axiological assumption (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, through the use of axiological assumption, I was able to acknowledge my perspective and values of the study as a researcher, but this assumption also allowed me to gather values from the participants throughout the completion of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study focuses on the completion of first-generation Black males who participated in a Black male initiative program. As the researcher, I confess that I am a first-generation Black male who has completed a bachelor's degree, master's degree, and a doctorate which is in progress. The knowledge I have concerns about the challenges of first-generation Black males are present; these challenges of retention, persistence, and

completion are present for all Black males enrolled in post-secondary education. In addition, to identifying as a first-generation Black male graduate, I also work with a Black male initiative program assisting male students of color with achieving academic success. Firsthand, I have seen the challenges both as a student and a professional. Personally, the challenges of finances, lack of support, and being a first-generation that is now familiar with a college setting are devastating. Therefore, I am grateful to serve in the capacity to encourage students to become active on campus and involved with initiatives that provide both academic and personal support.

Researcher's Role

For this study, I identify as a first-generation, Black male who has earned a college degree from a four-year institution. Personally, not only have I lived through similar experiences, but I have overcome similar obstacles as the participants in this study. Therefore, I can relate to the responses and understand the experiences. Daily, I devote my personal career to serving minority male students in higher education who may classify as first-generation and/or low-income students. These students are looking to achieve academic success by earning an undergraduate degree. The opportunity to serve these students as an academic and support coach allows me to assist Black male college students with identifying their potential to become successful college graduates.

Before conducting this study, I had no previous relationship with any of the participants. As a college graduate myself, I am familiar with the Southeastern region of the United States because I attended a four-year institution and worked in this region. Through conducting this study, I would like to take the lived experiences of first-generation Black male graduates and participants of a Black male initiative to improve the graduation odds for future first-generation Black males to come. This study will not take place at a familiar sight but will consist of first-

generation Black male graduates throughout the southeastern region of the United States of America. I have no personal connection with any of the future participants but knowing they must meet the requirements of being a first-generation Black male graduate who participated in a Black male initiative. Selecting participants from this region of the United States will allow the researcher to gather data and utilize the data to improve the current Black male initiatives. As the researcher of this study, my personal opinion supports the belief that Black Male Initiatives increase retention, persistence, and graduation rates for this specific population because I have been involved either as a student or employee in a Black Male Initiative.

I highlight the success of first-generation Black male college students by collecting and analyzing data from the interviews, artifact reflection, and journal responses. As the researcher, I have an established relationship with each of the participants in the study. The participants were selected based on my knowledge of who they are as first-generation students identifying as Black males and having earned an undergraduate degree. Based on my experience as a first-generation Black male college graduate, I have encountered challenges while persisting toward graduation. This study will help me as the researcher to understand the lived experiences of participants and how they achieved academic success.

Procedures

This process began by obtaining permission from the Institutional Review Board to conduct this study. Appendix A includes the IRB approval. This study did not need site approval because the participants in this study were not enrolled in college, and they had completed their degrees from an institution of higher learning. The researcher moved toward conducting data by utilizing the following college methods: one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and an artifact reflection after receiving IRB approval. The IRB process played a critical role in this study

because it allowed the researcher the opportunity to have access to collecting accurate data that met the participant criteria.

In this study, participants were selected using the purposeful sampling method. The purposeful sampling method worked best for this study because it allowed participants the opportunity to discuss their lived experiences as first-generation Black male college students (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants identified as first-generation Black males who had completed their post-secondary education with the assistance of being involved in a Black male initiative. Once the students identified as first-generation Black males who had participated in a Black male initiative and graduated from college, the researcher reviewed the participants. An introductory email was sent to the participants, providing them with a brief overview of the purpose of this study and an invitation to express their interest in participating in this study.

Permissions

This study did not require site permission because the researcher did not engage with participants who were currently enrolled in an institution of higher education. If the students were enrolled in any institution of some sort, the researcher would have taken the proper steps to request permission to utilize the site. The participants in this study had already completed college and earned a degree. Therefore, because there was no need for site permission, the researcher moved forward to the next stage of the research process.

Recruitment Plan

In this study, the researcher utilized purposeful sampling to select participants to engage actively in the research process. Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to develop a relationship with the participants and understand the phenomenon from different perspectives. Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants who would intentionally give their best

perspective on the research problem (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this case, first-generation Black male graduates who had participated in a Black male initiative were the targeted population because they had experienced the phenomenon and could provide firsthand experience. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that for a phenomenological study, the sample size should be between 5 and 25 participants. The researcher initially desired to utilize 10-12 participants in this study to elaborate on their experience as first-generation Black male graduates involved in a Black male initiative through interviews, focus groups, and an artifact reflection. Although the researcher selected a minimum of 10 first-generation Black males, the researcher continued until saturation was met. Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe saturation as the point at which the researcher no longer needs to collect data due to no new knowledge or insight evolving. The criterion sample method was used in this study because there was a requirement for participants to be first-generation Black male college graduates and individuals who had participated in a Black male initiative program. Creswell and Poth's (2018) criterion sampling refers to picking individuals who meet the criteria and requirements to participate in this study.

Data Collection Plan

Within this study, three data collection techniques were utilized to gather appropriate data that focused on the lived experiences of the participants. After IRB approval was granted, the researcher focused on the first data collection method, which consisted of one-on-one interviews with the researcher. Participants in the study needed to be first-generation Black males who had earned an undergraduate degree. The following collection methods were used: interviews, focus groups, and artifact reflection. One-on-one interviews were utilized during this study to develop the initial conversation and foundation between the researcher and the participants.

The primary goal of an interview is to hear what respondents think is important about the topic at hand and to hear it in their own words (DeCarlo, 2018). In addition, the researcher conducted focus groups to allow the participants to elaborate on what was stated during the interview session and to allow them to interact and discuss similarities and differences throughout their academic experiences; hosting a focus group after interviews provided validation and refinement for the researcher (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, the researcher will provide the participants with an opportunity to reflect on an artifact which will assist the researcher with his transcendental phenomenological study. The researcher will utilize the artifact reflection during the data collection process to enable the participants to elaborate respectfully concerning the phenomenon. A qualitative artifact reflection provided the researcher with a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon experienced by the participants. These selected data collection methods appropriately supported the research design highlighting the phenomenon and lived experience from several different perspectives.

Individual Interviews

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide the sole purposes for interviews include, among others, obtaining here-and-now constructions of persons, events, activities, organizations, feelings, motivations, claims, concerns, and past and future experiences. The individual interviews will consist of both structured questions and open-ended questions. Providing the opportunity for the participants to engage in individual interviews developed a rapport between the researcher and the participants. Interviews were conducted via a virtual platform such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, which allowed the researcher to record both through the virtual platform and an audio recording. Due to the participants being located throughout the southeastern region of the United States, the researcher scheduled appointments to conduct interviews with participants at an

appropriate time. The researcher took notes during the interview process in case recording equipment failed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). After completing the interviews, the researcher and participant member checked their recordings.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about yourself, such as your family background, where you are from, and your academic journey. CQ
2. Please tell me what motivated you as a first-generation college student to apply to college. CQ
3. Why did you choose to attend your institution? CQ
4. Please reflect on your college experience as a first-generation Black male graduate. CQ
5. Describe your experience in being a first-generation Black male graduate. SQ1
6. Describe some of the successes and challenges of your experience in the BMI. SQ1
7. How did being engaged in a Black male initiative assist you as a first-generation Black male graduate with overcoming obstacles during your academic journey? SQ1
8. Please elaborate on your involvement and experience in a Black male initiative. SQ2
9. Which specific component (tutoring, mentoring, student development, etc.) of a Black male initiative benefited you most? SQ2
10. How did you benefit from the resources offered by the BMI program in which you participated? SQ2
11. How did the Black initiative experience assist you with achieving the goal of graduating? SQ2

12. How did your experience in high school motivate you to pursue post-secondary education? SQ 3
13. Please elaborate on your pre-collegiate involvement and how it impacted you as a potential first-generation Black male. SQ 3

Interview questions 1-4 are introductory questions that allowed the researcher to develop a foundation with the participants. These questions started the process of highlighting their lived experiences. By developing a solid foundation and open communication, students became comfortable with exchanging information throughout the interview process (see Moustakas, 1994). Questions 1-4 focused on the overall interview questions and elaborated on the lived experience of the phenomenon. Questions 5-7 addressed the experiences of first-generation Black males in college and post-graduation. These three questions supported the first sub-question and provided the participants to freely share their experiences of being first-generation males actively involved on campus. Questions 8-10 supported sub-question 2 by allowing participants to answer questions centered around the Black male initiative programs they were involved in on-campus as a student. Interview questions 8-10 supported the need for students to be actively engaged and take advantage of the Black male initiative resources available. In an effort to make sure the interview questions were properly formed and supported the study, I allowed the research committee to review the questions.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

After the data were collected from the individual interviews, the researcher began analyzing the data using a phenomenological model process using Moustakas (1994) as a guide. First, the researcher started with the epoche process, which encourages an open reflective-meditation perception, allowing preconceptions and prejudgments to enter consciousness and

leave freely (Moustakas, 1994). In this process, the researcher set aside self and focused on the participants' lived experiences throughout analyzing the interview data. Next, the researcher participated in reflexive journaling to set aside his personal experiences and biases. Reflexive journaling is a technique that allows the researcher to record information about self throughout the data collection process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Appendix D includes a sample of the researcher's reflexive journaling. Epoche is the preparation for deriving new knowledge but also an experience, which leads to it being a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, and predispositions and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness and see things again for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). By setting aside self and focusing on the lived experiences, I used the bracketing strategy to identify common themes from the lived experiences of each individual interview. After starting with the epoche process, the researcher used the phenomenological reduction two-step process to understand things for what they are (see Moustakas, 1994). Utilizing phenomenological reduction, as the researcher, I saw firsthand the results from the interviews and understood the lived experiences from the participants' perspectives. As the researcher, I analyzed and bracketed common themes that focused solely on the research topic, and what did not apply to the research was not considered in the data (see Moustakas, 1994). In this analysis plan, I used imaginative variation as the next step in the process, which allowed me to see possible meanings through imagination, approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions (see Moustakas, 1994). In utilizing imaginative variation, I could experience the "how" of the phenomenon, providing a structural description of the lived experience (see Moustakas, 1994).

Physical Artifacts Data

In this study, the participants reflected on an artifact that inspired their educational journey as a Black male first-generation graduate. The participants were required to bring the artifact with them to the initial individual interview. After completing the individual review, the participants reflected upon the artifact by writing one to two paragraphs discussing its role in their academic careers. In this research study, the researcher utilized the artifact reflection to capture the experience firsthand from the participants (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this collection method, the participants reflected on the item that helped them understand the phenomenon and provided an understanding of the experience. In addition, the artifact reflection allowed the participants to elaborate on their motivation throughout the journey and the role this artifact played in their journey. After the participants completed the artifact reflection, the researcher collected and analyzed the artifacts by identifying similar themes and various perspectives.

Physical Artifacts Data Analysis Plan

The researcher reviewed each artifact reflection provided by the participants. The data analysis plan for the artifact reflection was analyzed just as the individual interviews and focus group collection methods were. To begin the analysis, the researcher started with the epoche process, which gave the researcher an open perception, allowing the preconceptions and prejudgments to enter and leave freely (see Moustakas, 1994). The epoche process allowed the researcher to consume new knowledge from the participants based on the reflections of the artifacts (see Moustakas, 1994). After developing new knowledge, the researcher bracketed those responses into themes. The next step for the researcher was to use the phenomenological reduction two-step process to examine the steps firsthand and to understand the reflections for what they are (see Moustakas, 1994). The researcher utilized imaginative variation to complete

the analysis process for the physical artifacts, which allowed the researcher to see possible meanings through imagination, approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives and different positions, roles, or functions (see Moustakas, 1994). Imagination variation allows the researcher to experience the “how” of the phenomenon, which highlights the major impact the phenomenon has on each participant (Moustakas, 1994). Using imaginative variation allowed the researcher to develop the themes that were common regarding the participants’ lived experiences.

Focus Groups

Focus group interviews will be the final source of data collection for this study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the purpose of focus groups is to disseminate the preliminary findings from the study and to gather feedback from the participants to ensure that the findings reflect their experience. Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other, when the time to collect information is limited, and when individuals interviewed one on one may be hesitant to provide information (Krueger & Casey, 2014; Morgan, 1997). The following focus group questions below will serve as a placeholder. After completing and analyzing the first two collection methods, the researcher used those themes identified from the first two collection methods to develop the focus group questions. Focus groups allowed the participants to go into detail about questions and experiences (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Additionally, focus groups confirmed the information the participants provided by developing solid themes and patterns gathered from one-on-one interviews and previous data collected. The focus groups were completed via a virtual platform such as Zoom or Microsoft

Teams; these platforms allowed the researcher to record the group sessions. Furthermore, I also utilized an audio tape recorder to support the virtual platform and took notes just in case there was a technological error. Along with the interviews, the focus groups were transcribed verbatim in an electronic document such as Microsoft Word.

Focus Group Questions

1. Introduce yourself, the institution you attended, and the highest level of degree earned.
2. Describe the Black male Initiative and how it contributed to your persistence and completion of your degree.
3. Describe specific services offered by the BMI that had an impact on you during your academic journey.
4. What role did your family play during your academic journey?
5. How did mentors play a role in your academic success?
6. Describe the sense of belonging you experienced while being involved in a BMI.
7. How did the BMI help you with becoming the Black male graduate you are today?
8. How could High Schools better prepare individuals like yourself to pursue a college degree?
9. Please elaborate on your transitioning experience from high school to college.
10. How did your experience as a Black male student impact your academic success?
How did your experience in BMI influence your professional career?
11. Describe how your beliefs helped you achieve your academic goals.
12. How did your expectation of being involved in a BMI influence your actual college experience?

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

The focus group data analysis plan was guided by the same analysis plan as the individual interview questions. Once the focus group interviews were completed, the researcher reviewed the data collected and started analyzing data using Moustakas's (1994) analysis plan. The researcher began the epoche process by eliminating any assumptions about the data and being open to new knowledge developed by analyzing the focus group results (see Moustakas, 1994). To gather the best results and identify the most effective themes, the researcher allowed the phenomenon to be exactly what it was supposed to be and to know the phenomenon exactly as it presented itself (Moustakas, 1994). After the initial epoche process, the researcher began the phenomenological reduction process. This process uncovered the ego for everything that has a meaning pertaining to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). By completing the phenomenological reduction process, the researcher identified what themes had meaning and contributed to the completion of this study. Phenomenological reduction supported the bracketing process by identifying the meaning of each experience while categorizing them into themes. Therefore, the researcher focused on the lived experiences the participants displayed and the meaning these experiences had. Lastly, imaginative variation allowed the researcher to examine the "what is" perspective (see Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation allowed the researcher to develop a structural description to support the identified themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Synthesis

I understood the data by synthesizing the data, which were categorized into themes applicable to the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) highlighted the final step of the

phenomenological research process as integrating the fundamental textural and structural descriptions. These two items were combined into a unified state of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Textural description gives an account of what is being experienced and the factors that have contributed to the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, structural description highlights the how, which speaks to the conditions of the experience and leads to what is being experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Through the structural description lens, the researcher examined the participants as to how they experienced the phenomenon in various conditions, situations, and contexts (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). The textural and structural descriptions highlighted the lived experiences the participants provided. The textural descriptions described the experiences of Black male first-generation college students who completed a degree, and structural descriptions provided details of first-generation Black males' lived experiences.

Trustworthiness

One effective way to determine the trustworthiness of the data collected from the participants was to allow them to check their responses to interviews, focus groups, and journal responses. Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that the truth of the findings must be established with confidence. Participants had access to information if they requested to see the data collected from their interviews, focus groups, and artifact reflection. In support of creating a solid, trustworthy study, in this section, the researcher elaborates on the following: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

In an effort to authenticate the data collected, participants were asked to review the responses submitted via interviews, focus groups, and artifact reflection. Member checking is

used to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings by taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining where these participants feel that they are accurate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Member checking is the most convenient but transparent way to confirm the data the researcher collected. Cross-validating and triangulating the interviews, focus groups, and artifact reflection is a credible way to authenticate the data collected from the participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) say triangulation allows the researcher to compare and contrast each collection method to identify the credibility of the information gathered from the individual interviews, artifact reflection, and focus groups. Credibility allows the researcher to feel confident in the data which has been collected throughout the study. In addition, the researcher will participate in prolonged engagement in the field of study, becoming familiar with data and developing trust between the participants and himself. Lincoln and Guba (1985) inform researchers that prolonged engagement requires an investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes (e.g., learning the culture, testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust).

Transferability

Creswell and Poth (2018) encourage researchers to provide a thick description for the transferability to be successful. The researcher must explain in full detail the setting and the participants involved in this study to provide transferability. A thick description of data, setting, and participants are necessary because this will assist future researchers with identifying potential needs and different populations and demographics to serve. Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and artifact reflection, but each piece of data collected was compared to identify similarities and themes (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability

Dependability and confirmability validate the data collected by the researcher and verified by the participants. A researcher looks for dependability in the collected data because the results will be subject to change and instability, but the researcher also looks for confirmability instead of objectivity in establishing the value of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), dependability allows the researcher to seek means to consider factors of instability and phenomenal or design-induced change. In addition, identifying consistent themes among the data collected will allow the researcher to show the data is solid and consistent.

Confirmability

Using interviews, focus groups, and artifact reflection provided the researcher with dependability and confirmability because they allowed the participants to validate their responses and express their perspectives truthfully. After successfully collecting the data, the researcher participated in member checks to confirm and interpret the data collected from the participants. Finally, the researcher establishes confirmability by auditing the research process and highlighting the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Participants in this study were provided consent forms, which provided an overview of the study and what was expected of them. Appendix C includes the consent forms. Data collected from the participants remained safe and secure on an external hard drive. An external hard drive was necessary for this study because the interviews and focus groups took place via Zoom. During the data collection process, the researcher must be aware of things such as time and the environment and limit conversation that does not contribute to the conversation.

Participants must be mindful and respectful of other participants as they express their opinions during the focus group. Additionally, the IRB process was a part of the ethical consideration to ensure the participants were aware of the research process and that the information they provide will be utilized to publish this study. The researcher is responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of the participants and the data provided and providing participants with a consent form agreeing to participate in the study.

Summary

The goal of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to highlight the lived experiences of first-generation Black males who graduated from college with a bachelor's degree and participated in a Black male initiative. By collecting data via interviews, focus groups, and artifact reflections, the information the researcher obtained supported this study. The researcher responsible for conducting interviews, focus groups, and engaging participants in reflecting on an artifact, analyzed the information and developed common themes to support the lived experiences of this specific population of students. Successful participants are described as first-generation Black male college graduates. The synthesized data represented the lived experiences of the participants involved in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black male college graduates who participated in a Black male initiative program. Chapter Four provides an overview of the participants, highlights the findings from the data analysis, and answers the research questions. In this chapter, a table provides descriptions of the participants, and the data are presented by themes, outlier data, and research question responses.

Participants

For the participants to remain confidential, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Each participant in this study identified as a Black male, first-generation college graduate who participated in a Black male initiative program. Participants attended a community college or a four-year college or university. Participants in this study held either an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree. Four of the ten participants attended a historically Black college or university (HBCU).

Data were collected from participants using interviews, focus groups, and a journal artifact reflection. Each participant provided a reflection describing what motivated them to graduate college. Both the interviews and focus groups were completed through the use of Microsoft Teams and Zoom, which provided the researcher and participants with an online interactive experience. The researcher utilized the following virtual platforms due to the participants being in various locations throughout the east coast region of the United States. Ten participants completed an individual interview with a range of 30-45 minutes to complete each interview. Each one-on-one interview was recorded by use of a secured audio device and through

the virtual recording feature of both Zoom and Microsoft Teams. At the conclusion of each interview, the participants were allowed 10-15 minutes to complete the artifact reflection, focusing on what motivated them to complete their college degree. There were two focus groups that took place during the study. The first focus group consisted of four participants, and the second focus group consisted of six participants. Each focus group lasted 45-60 minutes and was recorded via Zoom.

Table 1

Black Male Initiative Participants

Participant	Institution Attended	Degree	Major
Edison	HBCU/4 year	Bachelors	Religion & Philosophy
Howard	HBCU/4 year	Bachelors	Sociology
Tandy	HBCU/4 year	Bachelors	Criminal Justice
Jones	HBCU/4 year	Bachelors	Information Systems
Oswald	Community College/2 year	Associates	Computer Science
Raymond	PWI/4 year	Bachelors	Political Science/Sociology
Deion	Community College/2 year	Associates	Arabic Studies
Buddy	Community College/2 year	Associates	General Studies
Brian	Community College/2 year	Associates	General Studies
Alvin	Community College/2 year	Associates	Information Systems and Sciences

Results

This specific section allows the participants experienced to be highlighted without any misinterpretation or misrepresentation. First-generation Black male graduates elaborated on the role Black male initiatives played throughout their academic success. One central question and

three sub-questions focusing on the contribution of each question towards the completion of their degree guided this study. Three themes were identified in this study: Community, Engagement, and Support. Additionally, several subthemes evolved out of each theme: mentors, brotherhood, student development, investment, motivation, and pre-collegiate experience.

Theme 1: Community

The African Proverb highlights the importance of community when it says, “It takes a village, to raise a child” (African Proverb, n.d.). Community plays a tremendous role in several aspects of the participants' academic journey from the pre-collegiate experience to being a college graduate. The community for many of the participants is made up of immediate family members, mentors, peers, and community leaders. In the interview Edison states, “My mother had me at age fifteen, but we had help my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother all contributed to my upbringing” (Edison, interview, 2022). Jones stated in the interview

“My grandmother played a tremendous role in my upbringing, but she gave me two options go to work or go to school. I was raised by women, my dad was there but he wasn't, my grandmother raised me primarily and my mother raised me when she wasn't at work” (Jones, interview, 2022).

Mentors

Mentors played a tremendous role in the success of each participant. Jones gives credit in his interview to his mentors and professors for his preparation achieving both his associates and bachelor's degree. Jones highlights in the focus group

“Being involved in a program developed by his mentor made it easy to develop a voice and a position, and certain level of prestige amongst peers. My mentor sat me down and

told me the positive outcomes that could happen if I stayed in school” (Jones, focus group, 2022)

When it came to having a mentor, Buddy relied on his mentor for the serious talks, to speak life into him, to help him look up after looking down for so long (Buddy, interview, 2022). Edison stated in the interview “mentors were a huge part of my success, in terms of my development, opening doors, and helping me build connections, and being a grounded source” (Edison, interview, 2022). The foundation of mentoring requires faculty and staff who are committed promoting growth within the mentee. Edison also mentioned in his interview “mentors played a critical role in me finishing school and even continuing my education, mentors continue to play a strong role in that as well” (Edison, interview, 2022). Jones stated in the focus group,

“Being a part of a male initiative, I gained a forever mentor. The support that I got from my mentors is unexplainable, they would call me at 9:00 pm and 10:00 pm to provide support, to give me a talk and build me up and having that support is such a beautiful thing to make sure I am doing the right thing” (Jones, focus group, 2022).

Brotherhood

Brotherhood supports the mission of community by encouraging students to being involved and receiving support. Hopkins et al., (2021) state being part of a community, or finding a community where they belonged or fit was important for students to persist. Buddy states “brotherhood success is having likeminded people who are working and building on themselves, but having somebody at the head who is really devoted” (Buddy, interview, 2022). In the brotherhood Buddy highlights “peers are holding you accountable, because they see so much in you and they want so much for you in life, you must hold yourself accountable (Buddy,

focus group, 2022)". Oswald stated "Being in an initiative that supports brotherhood, allowed me to experience a welcoming environment that has allowed me to gain new friends and network opportunities" (Oswald, focus group, 2022). In the interview Brian says "the experience of success from the program was result in having the support of brotherhood and those you could lean on for support" (Brian, interview, 2022). Brian stated in the focus group "because the BMI was like a brotherhood, I was able to stay motivated and receive encouragement from others to keep me going" (Brian, focus group, 2022). Jones stated in the focus group "to gain a brotherhood, a group of guys who think like me and on better paths, striving for something more than the system is offering us, has been one of the most beneficial things about the male initiative" (Jones, focus group, 2022).

Theme 2: Engagement

First-generation students lack social capital related to being successful in higher education because they do not acquire it from their parents who did not earn a baccalaureate degree (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Jones stated, "engagement in a Black Male Initiative allowed him to develop people skills, gain leadership skills, overcome the fear of public speaking, and the opportunity to network" (Jones, interview, 2022). Buddy states "being involved in the program inspired him to go to class and to be more involved in his academic experience" (Buddy, focus group, 2022). Edison states "there were men before us who push us to be better than them, and to have an example of who we could emulate family men, strong community men" (Edison, interview, 2022). Buddy states

"Being engaged in a male initiative it allows you to be vulnerable and truly be yourself, people assist you with affirming your beliefs and dreams. Engaging in a male initiative

allows me to understand I am not alone, but with the male initiative you knew those guys in the brotherhood was going through similar experiences” (Buddy, focus group, 2022).

Student Development

Howard state “the BMI helped him with developing personal and professional relationships that allowed him to speak well, articulate himself and how to get along and support successful Black men like myself” (Howard, interview, 2022). Tandy believes that the BMI “ushered us from boyhood to manhood, that’s the most lasting impression the BMI had on me throughout my matriculation” (Tandy, focus group, 2022). Brown (2009) informs us that the premises of mentoring programs involves faculty and staff promoting social-emotional growth, improve academic success, advance school retention, and motivate the mentee to high standards. Edison believes “a huge part of college is not just academics, but there is a social piece that is intertwined as well” (Edison, interview, 2022). Edison likes that the “BMI required us to establish and find our own identity” (Edison, focus group, 2022). Brian believes his participation in a Black male Academic development course allowed him to develop as a student and serve as a peer mentor to other individuals who resemble him as a student (Brian, interview, 2022).

Investment

Students involved in BMIs will engage in a variety of purposeful events such as scheduled meetings, lectures, discussion-based workshops, retreats student’s leadership conferences, community service events, and group travel events (Druery & Brooms, 2019). Jones says the opportunity to participate in teambuilding and the opportunities to face your fears, public speaking, and opportunities to make mistakes allowed him to experience this beneficial component (Jones, focus-group, 2022). Oswald states “being involved with a one on one coach,

allowed me to have someone I could bounce ideas off of and talk with someone in regards to things that could be bothering him during the week” (Oswald, interview, 2022). Buddy stated “I built off of the one on one meetings, but also being involved in the Tuesday and Wednesday group meetings and having someone to hold me accountable and speak hope into me, really allowed me to benefit. The BMI has allowed me to become a better listener, engage in people conversation better, and take away what resonates with me, it has allowed me to become a better leader and listener” (Buddy, focus group, 2022). Jones stated “the male initiative provided me with a long-term investment of consistency, faith, and hard work” (Jones, focus group, 2022).

Theme 3: Support

For first-generation students and specifically Black males there is a lack of support, such as social, emotional, informational, and financial support from families and to non-FGCS receive support from families and beyond (Jenkins et al., 2013). Raymond states “I had more support from my mother, than father and my mom push me to get a college education, because it is something she never had” (Raymond, interview, 2022). Oswald stated “there are times I have wanted to give up and having the support from mentors to assist me with a struggle like is helpful, once I have a meeting with my coach, he will make sure I follow through after developing a plan to succeed” (Oswald, interview, 2022). Oswald believes the support you receive is a push and it helps you make the right decisions (Oswald, focus group, 2022). Buddy considered the support from mentors and peers to be a positive “nag” that allows you to keep going, be held accountable, and have someone you are not trying to let down is a true motivation (Buddy, focus group, 2022). Raymond believes being an older student allowed him to grow and learn to support others in the brotherhood despite age difference and classification status

(Raymond, interview, 2022). Deion states in his interview “the male initiative provided him with support that made him feel more comfortable, and can truly trust the brotherhood with his problems or concerns” (Deion, interview, 2022).

Motivation

Participants were challenged to identify a specific artifact which provided motivation for them to graduate college. Most participants highlighted the impact of family playing a major role in their motivation. Some participants referred to a mentor or the male initiative program as their motivation. In addition, some participants were motivated by self-motivation and previous challenges experienced. Raymond believes “wholeheartedly, mothers play an imperative role, mothers selflessly motivate their children in every stage of their life” (Raymond, artifact reflection, 2022). Oswald was motivated to complete his college degree after being involved in a terrible accident “the college degree became more important to me after a terrible accident, then I begin to value my graduation certificate and eagle globe and anchor received from the Marine Corps boot camp (Oswald, artifact reflection, 2022)”.

Buddy reflected upon his opportunity to give back to the male initiative program he graduated from, by providing current program students with a college tour. Buddy state “this experience reminded me of my goals and pursuits to continue to earn my bachelor’s degree and regain my appreciation and knowledge of my college (Buddy, interview, 2022)”. Tandy recalls being motivated by a picture of him, his mother, and his law enforcement badge. Tandy state this image “reminds me that the end of the goal was not only an accomplishment for myself but likewise for my mother who sacrificed a lot to get me to the pivotal moment of graduation (Tandy, artifact reflection, 2022)”. Brian simply stated “My family is my why, they have always believed in me (Brian, interview, 2022)”. Edison “the motivation for me to attend school is my

family, they have instilled and shown why education is vital for self-worth and success in my life. Without the stability and backing of their constant words of affirmation or care I would be able to do nothing in this world (Edison, artifact reflection, 2022)”.

Pre-Collegiate Experience

Tandy believes the Black population is not exposed in High School to enough resources like financial literacy, applying for financial aid, and the college application process which has limited us to pursuing a college degree. Edison state “helping students to understand the post-secondary collegiate much earlier in high school, incorporate the collegiate process in high school curriculum”. Jones believes more college days that are strategically built will serve a great purpose in preparing them for the college process. Oswald and Raymond agree that high schools should offer more mentoring programs that will highlight college resources and the college application process. There was a lack of support and conversation had with participants in regards to their post-high school plans.

Outlier Data and Findings

Unexpected findings and themes that do not align with specific research questions or themes are also presented. Limit this section to major unaligned findings that warrant the attention of your reader. In the unlikely event that your study has no major outlying findings, this section can be omitted. In this study there was a single outlier due to this participant having several experiences before attending college.

Outlier Finding #1 High Schools Need More Programs to Provide College Support and Consider All Options.

Majority of the participants had some kind of support or conversation that encouraged to consider college but Buddy felt differently. Buddy who attended a community college felt as if

the pre-collegiate conversation about post-high school plans kept him away from attending college. Buddy stated in the focus group,

When I was in high school, I had counselors who were there asking about post-high school plans, but I was a trouble kid and was not focused on college. But I think that started at home and I don't think the High School could've motivated me to go to college, because my mother was not present and I was doing me and having fun. Those conversations with the counselors deterred me from going to college and pushed me to go into the workforce and earning an automotive certificate. Those type of conversations and resources I wasn't open to at that time, but it prolonged my journey and destination towards graduating (Buddy, interview, 2022).

Most participants transitioned directly into high school and college. However, two participants went another route before pursuing their collegiate degree. Buddy highlighted in his interview, "I earned an automotive certificate while in high school, which motivated me to pursue workforce opportunities immediately after graduating high school (Buddy, interview, 2022)".

Research Question Responses

In this section there will be answers developed to support the research questions. The central question will be listed first and will be followed by the sub-questions. The answers provided for these research question will be short and direct narrative answers, with the support of utilizing themes developed in the previous section.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of first-generation Black male college graduates who participated in Black male initiatives? The participants credit their academic success and growth

as a first-generation Black male graduate to their respective male initiatives. The Black male initiatives have offered several components to engage the students and expose them to initiatives that highlight the importance of graduating. Howard believes “being involved in a Black male initiative is what has pushed me to graduate, by being involved in an initiative that helped me and allowed me to meet and experience like-minded individuals (Howard, interview, 2022)”.

Tandy states in the focus group,

It was important to go into the initiative with an open-mind, because eventually he was exposed to different facets of the college campus and the opportunity to engage and interact with people from different background, and to identify mentors from different backgrounds, but provided a great example for me as a first-generation Black male (Tandy, focus group, 2022).

Sub-Question One

What role did engagement such as Black male initiative play in handling challenges as a first-generation Black male who completed their post-secondary education? Participants were faced with several challenges, but the most common challenge was receiving academic support with classes they may have struggled with. Each initiative provided the participants with the access of academic support such as tutoring, academic coaching, and faculty connections.

Oswald highlights in his interview,

the male initiative has allowed me to connect with a tutor that also serves as a coach, but as I struggled to focus with math, I was able to develop a relationship with a person who held me accountable, mentored me, who motivated me by saying “you got this”, the coach talked me off of the ledge throughout many challenges (Oswald, interview, 2022).

Edison states in his interview that the peer mentor program has allowed him to understand that he was a “beneficiary of mentorship in college”, one of his favorite engagement opportunities was to go back to the local public schools in the community “to go back and build up young men who look like him and came from a similar context as he did”.

Sub-Question Two

What role did the Black Male Initiative play in the academic experience of first-generation Black males? The participants agreed in that the Black Male Initiative offered more than academic support, but also assisted them with developing characteristics and skills to build their confidence and be successful in the classroom. Deion states in his interview,

The BMI played a huge role in my academic experience because the initiative allowed me to open up more and to have a support system when it came to the course subject math. Being able to have this support system showed me they really cared when it came to me having anxiety while taking a math course. Through the support of the BMI, I have been able to address my math fear by receiving support from mentors and tutors.”

Alvin state in his interview,

If the BMI program did not provide me with tutoring to support my academic experience, I don’t think I would have graduated. I needed this one class which was elementary applied calculus to get into the University program information science program. The most I benefitted from the program is because the tutoring helped to me to pass the class” (Alvin, interview, 2022).

Sub-Question Three

How did pre-collegiate experience and involvement help you with selecting your college or university? The pre-collegiate experience for some participants did not play a part in their

decision to pursue a post-secondary education or select a certain college or university. However, for some participants their pre-collegiate experience did assist them with selecting their institution of choice. Buddy in his interview considered High School to be a wash,

It didn't really push me to go to college, I didn't have anything around me to push me to go to college. My mother said if you don't feel like you want to push through high school, then you don't want to go to college (Buddy, interview, 2022).

Edison states in his interview,

I was so oblivious to the university and post-secondary sector, my senior year of high school I was thinking about college, but it seemed like it was a long shot, because I had such a low GPA. During my 9th grade year, I met a man who was the choir director at the high-school who took me under his wings and I joined the high-school choir. He had a vision for me and helped shaped me into being the young man I am today, he is like a surrogate father to me. This mentor believed in me letting me know I was college material and he sat down with me and helped me complete the college application and helped me get into the university choir along with being accepted into the university. I had him to really mentor me and I yielded to his mentorship (Edison, interview, 2022).

Summary

This phenomenological study has explored the importance of first-generation Black male graduates participating in a Black male initiative as they matriculated through college.

Participants were graduates of community colleges and four-year colleges and universities, but they were able to relate and provide similar experiences from their academic success. Despite some of the participants may have started out on a different journey all participants give credit to their Black male initiative program as to why they were able to persist and complete college. The

Black males who participated in this study identified mentoring as the one of the strongest components of their experience as a student involved in a Black male initiative. The following themes (community, engagement, and support) and sub-themes (mentors, brotherhood, student development, investment, motivation, and pre-collegiate experience) were identified based on the data collected from the participants through interviews, focus groups, and an artifact reflection. This study advocates for the impact Black male initiatives may have with first-generation Black males through community, engagement, and support.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of first-generation Black male college graduates who have participated in a Black male initiative program. The conceptual framework that guided this study was Astin's (1984) theory of involvement. In this study the researcher collected data from participants by engaging in one on one interviews, focus groups, and a journal artifact reflection. Chapter five provides a concise overview of the following sections (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for policy and practice, (c) theoretical and methodological implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, (e) recommendation for future research, (f) and a conclusion.

Discussion

Black men who are enrolled in post-secondary institutions despite it being a four-year college or university or a two-year community college are challenged in several ways as they matriculate through their studies. I am aware as a first-generation Black male graduate, that there is a need of support for this specific population to achieve their academic success. Support in the form of a Black male initiative could provide academic, emotional, and physical support for first-generation Black male students that are faced with academic and non-academic barriers. Throughout this study it has been my goal to provide first generation Black male graduates with a voice to advocate on behalf of the success they have experienced by participating in a Black male initiative. In overall, this study highlighted the academic success and student development experienced by first-generation Black males who utilized the services offered by Black male initiatives throughout their journey to graduation. This discussion section offers five major subsections to review the (a) Interpretation of Findings; (b) Implications for Policy or Practice;

(c) Theoretical and Empirical Implications; (d) Limitations and Delimitations; and (e) Recommendations for Future Research.

Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black male graduates who have participated in a Black male initiative. In addition, this study has allowed me the researcher to understand how the participants of this study who identify as a first-generation Black male college graduate, succeeded in college with the support of a Black male initiative. Therefore, through participation in interviews, focus groups, and an artifact reflection the following themes were developed (a) community, (b) engagement, and (c) support.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The summary of thematic findings provides a summary to highlight significant findings and interpretations identified by the researcher during the study. The thematic findings for this study are (a) community, (b) engagement, and (c) support.

Belonging to Brotherhood. The opportunity to be a part of a brotherhood of likeminded individuals who are faced with similar challenges and barriers allows for students to be a part of a community. Brotherhood creates a sense of belonging for students. Institutions over the years have made efforts to combat these trends and experiences for Black males' students in higher education, by developing specialized programs, orientations, and campus/community groups/organizations (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018). Leadership programs that focus on student development allows students to take advantage of resources within the college community such as academic support, mentors (Sutton & Terrell, 1997). In the community of the BMI, the participants were provided a brotherhood, which promotes long-lasting friendships and network opportunities.

Safe Zone Safe Space. Brotherhood provided by the Black male initiative was a chance for peers to interact amongst each other with the support of a faculty or staff leader who may have served as a mentor or coach. The engagement of a Black Male Initiative provided students with a safe space to consider it as a place known as home. Brooms (2018) notes that the BMI programs offered a safe space to share and connect with other Black males known as peers or institutional agents. The goal of a Black Male Initiative is to provide a space for students to grow as a student and as a brotherhood through academic, emotional, and social support. In the space of a BMI, participant was exposed to opportunities that promoted growth as a student and as a Black male.

Iron Sharpens Iron. Participants relied on the support provided by their BMIs and mentors, because the support impacted their overall college experience. It was mentioned by the participants how they looked forward to having the one on one coaching and advising session, because this served as a reality to check for them when it came to academic and personal growth. One of the leading components of support provided to the participants is the connection with a mentor. Robinson (2021) mentoring has been recognized as a powerful tool that can support efforts toward increasing social and emotional learning and connect underserved individuals with reliable human resources who can motivate student to achieve high standards. There was a commitment from both the participant and the mentor when it came to participating in a mentorship opportunity.

Implications for Policy or Practice

Enrollment and graduation rates continue to rise for Black men who are pursuing a post-secondary education. In order to support this specific population of students who are enrolling in community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, HBCUs and PWIs must be offered

support throughout their academic journey. This study will provide an overview of knowledge providing a first-hand experience on how institutions of higher learning can offer support for first-generation Black males from the perspective of policy and practice. Recommendations will be made throughout this section for higher education administrators, faculty, staff, and future professionals.

Implications for Policy

Institutions of higher learning must develop the tenacity to create a commitment that supports the academic journey of special population groups such as first-generation Black male college students. Leadership such as the President should challenge the executive cabinet to advocate for the importance of support groups that promotes enrollment initiatives focusing on retention and completion. These support groups may explore ongoing barriers and issues that are faced by first-generation Black male college students. The results from this study has proven that mentorship and brotherhood work when it comes to having a support system. Therefore, an adequate support system put into place and highly supported by administration will provide special populations students such as the participants in this study with a sense of belonging. Institutions of higher learning must be sure to ensure higher representation of Black faculty members and integrating equity goals and efforts into institutional strategic plans (Harris, et al., 2016).

Leadership can implement policies that support special populations groups by encouraging college faculty and staff to become involved and offering the ongoing support for these particular students. The college campuses should always have a safe-space such as a multi-cultural program specifically a Black male initiative to highlight the success such as academic and personal growth for students who identify as a Black male student. Black male initiatives are

considered to be a critical resource and program to help students garner social and cultural capital, but also to be connected to with other Black males' peers and institutional agents in a safe space (Brooms, 2018). A well-developed BMI will again provide the students with a sense of belonging, but it will also encourage the student to be proud of who they are and what they stand for. Students will enter college with the ultimate goal of graduating, but participating in a BMI program will awaken their sense of purpose toward successfully completing college (Brooms, 2018).

Implications for Practice

The following recommendations are necessary to institutions of higher learning to be successful at providing adequate support to first-generation Black male students. Institutions should implement a male initiative program that will provide support for on-campus support for Black male students. Due to the growing body Black male students in higher education institutions must implement student identified supports such as early alert systems and ethnic support groups such as BMIs (Abbott & Martinez, 2018). In addition, provide students with programming that will encourage their growth, address trending topics for this specific population, but also develop characteristics that will assist them throughout their academic journey. The opportunity for students to participate in programming dedicated to their specific populations will encourage them to develop relationship with faculty, staff, and peers that may resemble them and is committed to their success inside and outside of the classroom.

The senior leadership team such as the President and their cabinet members should offer professional development opportunities to faculty and staff members who are committed to supporting the male initiative and the students involved. In addition, this will allow the institution to advocate for special population students, but also to highlight their support for

making sure all students can succeed at their respective institution. Developing support programs which promote the academic success for this population will assist student academic and social integration. Academic integration focuses on the intellectual pursuits and social integration supports emotional and psychological well-being (Clark et al., 2014).

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

Previous research studies concerning first-generation Black male graduates have focused on the barriers, challenges, and racial stereotypes that are faced by this specific population of students. African American men are under-represented at most institutions of higher learning, maintaining a low academic achievement when compared to their peers (Hall, 2017). The goal for my study is to understand how does involvement play a role in academic success for first-generation Black male graduates through the lens of Astin's student involvement theory. Based on Astin's theory student involvement plays a tremendous role in a student's campus experience and academic success. In order for maximum growth and learning to occur the student must be actively engaged on their campus (Astin's, 1984).

Specifically, my research highlights the engagement and involvement of first-generation Black male graduates who have participated in a Black male initiative and have been successful due to their participation. Certainly, when it comes to this specific topic there is a lack of theories addressing the involvement or the experience of first-generation Black male graduates who have participated in a Black male initiative. My study will expand previous research by providing a new perspective of academic success involving first-generation Black males involved in a Black male initiative.

Therefore, Astin's theory of student involvement was the best theory for this study, because it looks beyond the issues faced by students such as race, financial barriers, but it looks

at the engagement piece of how these students are able to develop a sense belonging through a Black male initiative through mentorship and brotherhood. This sense of belonging leads into the students becoming successful at overcoming the present barriers. This study will add tremendously to the field of literature when it comes to exploring the involvement of Black male graduates, Black male initiatives and first-generation students. Based on the results from this study Black males are more productive in college and are more likely to graduate because of their involvement in a Black male initiative. Black males engage more in tutoring, study sessions, and similar “practices” related to academic performance after college entry than their White male peers (Harris, 2018). I believe this study will add true knowledge to the field of study, but also will give researchers the opportunity to look beyond the barriers and identify possible solutions for this specific population to be successful through involvement. The novel contribution added to the field of study from my research will shed light on the effectiveness of support groups such as Black male initiatives.

Participants shared their lived experiences on involvement and stories of success by crediting the Black male initiative program in which they participated in highlighted the importance of Astin’s theory of student involvement. This theory and literature have allowed the participants to acknowledge their commitment given to the program to be involved, receive support, adequate resources, and achieve success both personally and academically.

In this study it is the theory that proves first-generation Black male graduates who have engaged in Black male initiatives have been successful in their academic journey, because of their ability to matriculate as a student but most importantly as a young Black male with the support and involvement of the Black male initiatives. For future Black male students and their parents, this study has provided an experience for future families to consider identifying a

support resource like a Black male initiative on the student's campus to develop a connection and take advantage of the resources that will promote academic success. This specific design highlighted the importance of involvement for students, which shows in the results that first-generation Black males can succeed in college with the help of support programs such as Black male initiatives.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations represents weakness in the research that the author acknowledges so that future studies will not suffer from similar problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, the researcher will focus on the weakness and challenges that cannot be controlled. Therefore, one challenge was the ability to identify times for each participant to participate in one on one interviews. Although, the interviews were conducted via zoom and Microsoft Teams it was a challenge for participants to schedule interview times. There were some issues with technology some participants were not familiar with using Microsoft Teams, but we utilized the Zoom platform as a backup option. Participants were slow to respond with an artifact reflection, they were asked to reflect on an artifact that motivated them to completed college. This study was completed post-pandemic; however, they were some participants who became ill during the process and this cause a delay in data collection for a short period. One potential participant loss his mom the day of our one on one interview, being that I could relate his loss, I ask the participant not to worry about the research study and please take care of his family.

Delimitations are purposeful decisions made by the researcher during this process to limit or define the boundaries of this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Also, the limitation of being able to separate experiences related to being a FGCS and a Black Male student. The delimitation in this study noted by myself is the ability to conduct research on first-generation Black male

graduates who have participated in a Black male initiative program. There is literature supporting the overall experience of Black males in college, but not from the perspective of a first-generation Black male and Black male initiative perspective. While completing the literature review I noticed that there was plenty of literature highlighting the experience of Black male students attending a PWI, but I wanted to highlight the experience of first-generation Black males who have attended PWIs, HBCUs, four-year and two-year colleges. These purposeful decisions will provide data from participants who have completed a post-secondary education through participation in a Black male initiative as a first-generation college student. This will add a much broader perspective to the literature because now we have examined the lived experiences of first-generation Black male graduates who actively participated in a Black male initiative. In the literature, you will find the purpose of Black male initiatives and what these initiatives are designed to do, but this particular experience in research confirms the capability of these initiatives for first-generation Black male graduates.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has provided a solid foundation of highlighting the success specifically for first-generation Black males who have engaged in a Black male initiative and earned their post-secondary degree. However, there is a continuing need to improve research, add to literature and study the experiences of the academic journey of Black males in higher education. The need to continue will allow current and future research to continue exploring the lived experiences for minority males such as the Black male participants in this study. Future research should examine Black males who are currently enrolled and pursuing their degree but also actively involved in a Black male initiative program. Future research should consider studying other minority groups such as Hispanic males who are pursuing a post-secondary degree. I think it will be beneficial in

the future to complete a study focusing on Black males involved in a Black male initiative at a HBCU and a PWI, to see if there are similar or different experiences for the participants. Future research should consider weighing in to see if race plays a role in the student's academic experience and graduating. Future researchers should consider utilizing a the following studies case study, ethnography, or quantitative study to analyze data and develop a Black male initiative platform to help build these programs on campuses throughout the United States. In addition, future researchers should consider studies that focus on just four-year institutions, two-year institutions, and all participants in Black Male Initiatives.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black male college graduates who participated in a Black male initiative program. This study examined the impact of Black male initiative programs on this specific population and the program assisting each student with being successful during their academic journey. The study was guided by a central research question "What are the lived experiences of first-generation Black male college graduates who participated in Black male initiatives?". Astin's theory of student involvement provided a conceptual framework for the study highlighting the positive perspective of being involved while enrolled in college. This study consists of 10 first-generation Black male graduates who have earned an associate or bachelor's degree from a two-year or four-year college. Participants participated in an individual interview, focus groups, and an artifact reflection that provided me with the necessary data to analyze. In this study, I noticed based on the data this specific group of men relied heavily on their engagement in a Black male initiative program because it provided them with community, engagement, and support. Key contributors to the success of first-generation Black male

graduates and BMI participants are the relationships such as mentorship and brotherhood, but the academic and social support also played a role in their student's success. Institutions of higher learning can continue serving and advocating for Black male students that are first-generation by providing them with support throughout their academic journey. This support consists of developing strategic initiatives such as the Black male initiative to provide a safe space for these specific students but to promote academic and personal success. Administration must take the time to understand the specific population they are serving and what is needed for these students to be successful inside and outside of the classroom. By providing the opportunity for first-generation Black male students to be actively engaged on campus is an investment towards achieving their long-term goal of earning a post-secondary education. Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune said it best "Knowledge is the prime need of the hour" (Mary McLeod Bethune, n.d.).

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 6, 2022

Rah'Shad Bryant
James Eller

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY22-23-119 The lived experiences of first-generation Black male graduates who participated in a Black male initiative program

Dear Rah'Shad Bryant, James Eller,

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: September 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(s) 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(s) 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(s) 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: Consent Form

Title of the Project: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION BLACK MALE GRADUATES WHO PARTICIPATED IN A BLACK MALE INITIATIVE PROGRAM

Principal Investigator: Rah'Shad Ra'Hyim Bryant, 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 at least 18 years of age or older, identify as a first-generation, Black man, and have completed an undergraduate two-year or four-year degree from an institution of higher learning. Participants must have participated in a Black Male Initiative at their respective institutions. 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 transcendental phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black male college graduates who participated in Black male initiatives. This study will highlight the impact Black Male Initiative programs have on first-generation Black males who pursue either a two-year or four-year degree.

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. Complete an audio and video-recorded virtual interview. This virtual interview should take 30-45 minutes to complete. [First task/procedure]
2. Participate in an artifact reflection journal by reviewing the artifact of your choice and elaborating on the impact this artifact has made during your educational journey. This task will take 10-15 minutes.
3. Participants will review their transcripts from the individual interview.
4. Participants will participate in an audio and video-recorded virtual focus group. This task should take 45-60 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include spreading awareness concerning first-generation Black males who plan to pursue post-secondary education. An additional benefit is highlighting additional resources such as Black male initiatives that support retention, persistence, and graduation for male students of color.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in 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. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- 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.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to 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 Rah'Shad Bryant. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] and/or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. James Eller, 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 agree 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-record/video-record/photograph me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix C: Recruitment

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Philosophy in Higher Education Administration. The purpose of my research is to understand the experiences of first-generation Black male graduates who participated in a Black male initiative program, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, if applicable, and identify as first-generation Black male graduates and have participated in a Black male initiative. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in one or more collection methods: individual interviews (30-45 minutes), artifact reflection (10-15 minutes), and focus group interviews (45-60 minutes). You will have the option to participate in member checking. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED] for more information to schedule an interview.

Sincerely,

Rah'Shad Bryant
Doctoral Student, Doctorate of Philosophy: Higher Education Administration

Appendix D: Interview Questions/Guide

1. Please tell me about yourself, such as your family background, where you are from, and your academic journey. CQ
2. Please tell me what motivated you as a first-generation college student to apply to college. CQ
3. Why did you choose to attend your institution? CQ
4. Please reflect on your college experience as a first-generation Black male graduate. CQ
5. Describe your experience in being a first-generation black male graduate. SQ1
6. Describe some of the successes and challenges of your experience in the BMI. SQ1
7. How did being engaged in a Black male initiative assist you as a first-generation Black male graduate with overcoming obstacles during your academic journey? SQ1
8. Please elaborate on your involvement and experience in a Black male initiative. SQ2
9. Which specific component (tutoring, mentoring, student development, etc.) of a Black male initiative benefited you most? SQ2
10. How did you benefit from the resources offered by the BMI program in which you participated? SQ2
11. How did the Black initiative experience assist you with achieving the goal of graduating? SQ2

Appendix E: Artifact Reflection

The participants will reflect on an artifact that has inspired their educational journey as a Black male first-generation graduate. Participants will be required to bring the artifact with them to the initial individual interview. After completing the individual review, the participants will reflect on an artifact by writing one to two paragraphs discussing the role the artifact has played in their academic careers.

Appendix F: Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. Introduce yourself, the institution you attended, highest level of degree earned.
2. Describe the Black Male Initiative and how it contributed to your persistence and completion of degree.
3. Describe specific services offered by the BMI that had an impact on you during your academic journey.
4. What role did your play family during your academic journey?
5. How did mentors play a role in your academic success?
6. Describe the sense of belonging you experienced while being involved in a BMI.
7. How did the BMI help you with becoming the Black male graduate you are today?
8. How could High Schools better prepare individuals like yourself to pursue a college degree?
9. Please elaborate on your transitioning experience from High School to College.
10. How did your experience as a black male student impact your academic success? How did your experience in BMI influence your professional career?
11. Describe how your beliefs helped you achieve your academic goals?
12. How did your expectation of being involved in a BMI influence your actual college experience?