AN EXPLORATION OF THE ROLE PERSISTENCE PLAYS FOR FIRST-GENERATION,

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES ENROLLED AT FOUR-YEAR, PRIMARILY WHITE

INSTITUTIONS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Daniel M. Lee

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Many first-generation, African American male students who enroll in primarily White institutions do not persist. This phenomenological study aimed to understand academic persistence in first-generation African American male students enrolled at a four-year, primarily White institution. The theory guiding this study is the theory of human motivation developed by Abraham Maslow. Maslow's theory of motivation provided the necessary framework that assisted in understanding the basic needs required first-generation, African American male students to persist academically. A qualitative research methodology was appropriate as it is designed to increase understanding of first-generation African American male students' lived experiences as they endeavor to persist academically. Transcendental phenomenology was selected for this study because it allowed the researcher to develop essential descriptions of the participants' lived experiences. The setting for this transcendental, phenomenological study was a four-year, private institution, Odonald Hill University, located in the Midwest region of the United States. The sample was derived from a Facebook Group, *Empowering African American First Gen*. The selected sample size was 12 first-generation, African American, male students enrolled in a US four-year, primarily White institution. The researcher utilized three data collection methods: semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys to attain data. Data analysis for this study followed Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam method of data analysis.

Keywords: African American, first-generation college students, Historically Black College and Universities, persistence, primarily White institutions, retention.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my creator, from whom all good things flow!
I dedicate this to my grandmother, Mattie M. Lee, who inspired me to pursue Higher
Education. To my loving wife, Kristin, who provided moral and spiritual support throughout my
doctoral journey. To my loving parents, Michael and Debbie, who gave me moral lessons and a
Biblical base at an early age. Their lessons taught me the importance of honoring God in
everything you do. To my loving in-laws, Peles and Regina, thank you for your prayers and
support. To the memory of my grandmother, Alberta, who always believed in my abilities to earn
a doctoral degree. To my son, Joshua, may you pursue knowledge throughout your life.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my chair, Dr. Susan Stanley, and committee member, Dr. Kevin White. I am thankful to God for providing me with a patient and committed committee who covered me in prayer and provided encouragement throughout this journey. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (New King James Version, 1982/2004, Jeremiah 29:11).

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The persistence of first-generation, African American males is an area of concern in post-secondary education. Taking the step to enter higher education as a first-generation, African American male can be very intimidating but necessary if one desires to increase upward mobility in the United States (Azmitia et al., 2018). The atmosphere of a higher education institution is vastly different and requires proper resources and support systems for persistence and matriculation. One proven method to support first-generation, African American male students is Black male initiatives (Brooms, 2018b). Black male initiative programs provide resources that assist African American male students to identify and face unique challenges that can inhibit their academic persistence during their educational careers (Brooms, 2019).

The significance of this study examined first-generation African American males' educational experiences who attended a primarily White institution in the Midwest, using the theory of human motivation as the theoretical framework (Maslow, 1943). Chapter One provides the background information required to fully understand the selected theory regarding the research on the persistence of first-generation, African American males enrolled at primarily White institutions (PWIs). The information provided delineated the purpose of this study and why attrition in first-generation, African American males is characterized as a problem in higher education. Chapter One also conveyed the necessary background, research questions, and definitions critical to the readers' understanding of the selected research. This study was designed to answer the following questions: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest? What role did participation in Black Male Initiatives play in

first-generation, African American male academic persistence in a primarily White institution (PWI)? How do first-generation, African American male students describe their academic preparedness when enrolling into a primarily White institution? How does intrusive academic advising affect perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students?

Background

Higher education in America has become more diverse since the 1800s with the increased recruitment of African American male students (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Researchers have indicated that African American male students that attend historically White institutions experience challenges that often hinder their ability to persist and achieve academic success as their peers. With increased numbers of Black students enrolling into institutions of higher learning, they are also, unfortunately, leaving institutions at substantially higher rates than their White peers. Only 25% of African American men graduate within four years from the institution in which they first enrolled, and only 33% graduate within six years (Shapiro et al., 2017). Many factors contribute to the low persistence rates of African American males, such as insufficient mentoring, student support services, and a lack of academic preparation (Wallace & Gagen, 2020).

African American males have increased access to higher education but are not graduating. Approximately 1.2 million African American males enrolled in college since the turn of the century, with nearly 50% attending PWIs (Ottley & Ellis, 2019). One of the first barriers identified for first-generation, African American males is the need for academic support. *Academic support* is defined as an intervention designed to provide instructional

methods and educational services that assist students in accelerating skill acquisition and the learning processes needed to succeed academically (Slapac & Coppersmith, 2019).

One method of academic support is intrusive academic advising. Intrusive academic advising enhances the student's learning experience by providing educational plans that support the student's educational goals. Intrusive academic advising also provides advisors the opportunity to identify early warning signs that can cause a first-generation, African American male student to experience academic pitfalls or place them at risk of failure (Johnson et al., 2019). Through intrusive advising, academic advisors can identify academic problems early, which has proven to positively impact the persistence rates of first-generation, African American male students (Johnson et al., 2019).

Another proven method is establishing supportive relationships with faculty and peers through Black Male Initiatives. *Black Male Initiatives* can be defined as a dedicated learning community for African American males that promotes brotherhood and develops leaders through academic success, personal growth, professional development, and self-responsibility (Brooms, 2018b). When Black Male Initiatives are established, they improve retention, persistence, and graduation of the male African American students involved (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Black male initiative programs have been proven to also aid in improving students' sense of belonging, which is an essential component to improve persistence and graduation rates (Brooms, 2018a).

Historical Context

Higher education in America has a complex history due to the institutional racism birthed in the 1800s, which forced African American males to pursue the dream of attaining education at segregated colleges and universities (Bracey, 2017). Preceding the Civil War, there was no established or structured educational system for African American males. Separate education

was encouraged due to racism and the unwillingness to view African American males as humans and individuals worthy of a college education. Due to segregation, the first institution of higher education for African Americans, The Institute for Colored Youth, was founded in 1837 in Chaney, Pennsylvania, sparking the birth of two other Black institutions, Lincoln University located in Pennsylvania and Wilberforce University located in Ohio (Wiggan & Scott, 2015). The Second Morrill Act of 1890 and the 1896 Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* were vital to establishing many historically Black colleges and universities (Palermo & Fusani, 2021). The birth of historically Black colleges and universities provided African American males the opportunity to earn a college education in a supportive environment, just as their Caucasian peers.

Access to higher education has improved since the early years of higher education for African American males. However, improved access without adequate support creates additional barriers for African American males who desire a higher education degree. African American males who are first-generation students can experience culture shock and a decreased sense of belonging due to the systemic racism often present within PWIs (Havlik et al., 2020b). The systematic racism present during the colonial heritage of America appears to be ongoing and affects African American males who are first-generation students who desire to persist (Squire et al., 2018).

Social Context

Persistence is an essential tool required when endeavoring to achieve academic success. When first-generation, African American males persist in higher education, it can create greater social integration within the campus and the community (Druery & Brooms, 2019). Integration within the campus and the community creates opportunities for African American males to gain

and apply the leadership competencies necessary to provide good examples and social support for younger African Americans. As African American males persist, it offers opportunities to establish Black male initiative programs that can positively impact students' pre-college and collegiate levels. Black male initiative programs also enhance students' sense of belonging, which is essential to academic success.

Successful matriculation of African American males provides a beacon of hope for younger generations within the community and the institution by providing a blueprint for success that can assist students in conquering barriers within their educational journey. Contrarily, when African American males do not persist in higher education, it negatively affects them. Research has shown that one of the common reasons African American males do not prevail at PWIs is racial discrimination (Brezinski et al., 2018). Due to the importance of the proposed research, higher learning and secondary education systems will utilize and benefit from the proposed research.

Theoretical Context

The academic persistence struggles of first-generation, African American male students have encountered can be connected to three principal theories to establish the theoretical framework. The first is oppositional cultural theory. Oppositional cultural theory is a theory that argues that minority students develop a resistance perspective against cultural spaces such as schools where whiteness is rewarded. People of color are often subservient; in the literature, subservient is considered lower academic expectations from academic leadership and academic community members (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The second theory is Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. Bandura's self-efficacy theory focuses on an individual's conviction in their ability to carry out required behaviors to achieve. The third theory that assists in explaining the

challenges many first-generation, African American males face in a higher education setting is Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure. Tinto's theory of student departure focuses on students' departure from higher education due to the nature and quality of interactions at their institution. The theory of student departure outlines the challenges that students experience by listing three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation (Tinto, 1987). During separation, the first stage of the theory, students distance themselves from their communities when they arrive at college. When the process of separation occurs, students begin to adopt foreign cultural norms of the institution, which is essential to their academic success and persistence (Tinto, 2006). The second transition stage is initiated when students obtain behaviors and norms crucial to fully engaging in the collegiate atmosphere (Tinto, 1987). The transition that occurs is frequently shaped by the student's personal goals and can be extremely challenging if the student enters the institution without a thorough understanding and a clearly-defined academic mission (John et al., 2004). The final stage of incorporation transpires when students are ready to fully integrate socially and academically into the institution's environment, developing relationships with peers, community, faculty, and staff. Within the theory of student departure, many first-generation, African American male students struggle in the first and second stages. The familiar community and support can appear distant while attempting to adjust to a foreign atmosphere that requires acceptance of new knowledge while adopting foreign cultural norms.

Research concerning the persistence of African American male students has provided educators and institutions strategies to identify factors influential to African American male student persistence. Institutions and educators should be cognizant of a student's background, academic readiness, and sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2017). Awareness of this magnitude requires institutions and their members to create specialized programming to provide the support

structure that is necessary to influence African American males to persist in a four-year institution (Lucas, 2018). Strayhorn (2017) provided plausible research exploring African American students' hostility while enrolled in PWIs. The graduation rates of African American males continue to fall compared to White students. Such perceptions significantly affect African American male students' endeavors to navigate higher education (Lucas, 2018). Researchers have sought to conduct concise studies to highlight the barriers that impact an African American male's ability to persist at a primarily White institution.

Although many studies have concerned African American male student persistence, few studies focus on first-generation, African American male persistence (Simmons, 2019). Such research is necessary to assist institutions and educators in creating strategies to improve first-generation, African American male persistence within four-year institutions (Harper, 2015). When strategies are created, members of an institution must be willing and committed to implementing strategies for change to occur (Lucas, 2018).

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this research is the low persistence rates of first-generation African American males enrolled at four-year primarily White institutions. One barrier contributing to low persistence rates for first-generation, African American male students is the lack of support systems that significantly impact their ability to persist as their peers (Davidson et al., 2020). While there is substantial research concerning African American male students, there is limited knowledge and understanding concerning African American males who are first-generation students who attend primarily White four-year institutions. First-generation, African American male students are impacted by a lack of belonging and sound support systems (Xu & Lancaster, 2017). Research statistics indicated that 36% of African American males graduate

from college in six years compared to 63% of Caucasian students (Simmons, 2019). Additional

research conducted by the Institute of Education Sciences indicated that African American male

students have the lowest sixth-year graduation rate among all races and sexes (National Center

for Education Statistics, 2020).

　　　Prior research focuses on the lack of academic preparedness before enrolling into a four-

year institution of higher learning and the inequitable conditions in the secondary education of

African American and Caucasian students. Flennaugh et al. (2017) suggested that in the 9-12

level underqualified teachers, unstable leadership, and high student-to-counselor ratios affect the

academic preparedness of African American students. These factors can also affect their ability

to navigate post-secondary education. When the educational foundation of African American

students is unstable, it can significantly impact the ability to adapt and navigate the structure of

education at PWIs. The atmosphere of PWIs can be difficult to endure for African Americans

due to differences in values, culture, and beliefs, which often correlates to the culture shock that

affects a student's sense of belonging (Lewis et al., 2021).

　　　The academic and social atmosphere is critical to student persistence (Burt et al., 2019).

Current research has proven that stressors such as social isolation and the experience of racial

microaggressions result in penurious psychological and academic outcomes (Hunter et al., 2019).

Additional research can divulge strategies for four-year institutions to improve retention

matriculation rates. Effective strategies must increase first-generation, African American males'

desire to persist within PWIs. This research examined the impact of self-perception and external

support that affects a student's ability to persist.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study was to explore the

perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students

concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest. For this

study, first-generation, African American males' low persistence rates was defined as having

lower matriculation and graduation rates than their peers in other ethnic groups. *Persistence* was

defined as continued enrollment (or degree completion) at any higher education institution,

including one different from the institution of initial enrollment in the fall semesters of a

student's first and second year (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2016).

The theory guiding this study was Maslow's human motivation theory. Maslow's human

motivation theory (Maslow's hierarchy of needs) was selected for this phenomenological study

because it is a motivational theory that comprises a five-tier model of human needs described in

the Maslow's hierarchal levels pyramid (Maslow, 1943). The hierarchy of needs is divided into

deficiency and growth needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs consists of psychological, safety,

social, esteem, and self-actualization needs. The lower needs of the hierarchy must be satisfied

before the needs higher on the pyramid can be fulfilled. Maslow's human motivation theory

defines elements essential to first-generation, African American male student persistence when

enrolled at a primarily White institution (Jones, 2020).

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a phenomenological study explores the

commonalities of experiences of individuals, which assist in the development of what an

individual experiences and how they experience it. Transcendental phenomenology was selected

for this study because it allows the researcher to develop textural and structural descriptions of

the participants' experiences to express the totality of their lived experiences. As conveyed in the

literature review, the lived experiences of first-generation, African American males enrolled in PWIs was studied (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2017).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this transcendental, phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest. The literature indicates that African American males encounter many challenges that impact their educational journey and academic success (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Research throughout the years has shown that PWIs have failed to implement needed strategies and programs that address the issues that African American males face at their institutions (Lucas, 2018). This study contributed to current literature by highlighting the necessary strategies and support systems required to improve the persistence rates of first-generation, African American males.

Existing literature indicates that many PWIs are not equipped to handle the needs of African American male students who enroll in their institutions due to the lack of adequate resources and supportive structures (Lucas, 2018). Walls and Hall (2018) stated that unprepared faculty members also contribute to experiences that negatively affect the academic persistence of African American male students enrolled at PWIs. Many faculty members are not prepared to lead classroom discussions concerning external factors, contributing to African American males' hostile classroom atmosphere and experience. Negative classroom experiences and interactions with professors significantly impact a student's desire to persist when institution members do not provide support when needed.

When applied, the selected theory of human motivation stimulated a new understanding of first-generation, African American male student persistence. The theory of human motivation

also highlighted specific needs that are required to be met to encourage first-generation African American male students' persistence. Many studies focus on African American male student persistence, but few studies focus on first-generation, African American male students needs concerning academic persistence. Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation provided a framework of the basic needs required to improve first-generation, African American male students' academic persistence in four-year, primarily White institutions.

The findings from this study encourages higher education institutions to improve first-generation, African American males' experiences based on feedback received from this study's participants. This research provided data and strategies to create essential resources to ensure student success. Higher education institutions and their programs can benefit from this study by utilizing the data to implement strategic programming to serve first-generation, African American male students' unique needs.

Research Questions

Many factors affect first-generation, African American male student persistence (Simmons, 2019). Providing adequate academic and social support can improve first-generation, African American male students' academic persistence (Miller & Bryan, 2020). With increasing numbers of first-generation, African American males failing to persist, understanding contributing factors is essential (Foy, 2018). This study utilized the following central question and the sub-questions to guide the phenomenological study:

Central Research Question

What are the perceptions and lived experiences of first generation, African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest?

Experiences of first-generation, African American male students who attend PWI do not resemble their White peers' experiences (Hines et al., 2020). The social and academic atmosphere within the classroom significantly influences first-generation, African American male students' desire to persist (Brooms, 2016). This question allowed participants to describe their educational and social experiences and how the experiences impacted their desire to persist (Simmons, 2019).

Sub-Question One

What role did participation in Black Male Initiatives play in first-generation, African American male academic persistence in a PWI?

Black male initiatives improve academic retention and graduation of first-generation, African American male students (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Black male initiatives also assist in improving first-generation, African American male students' sense of belonging, which is essential to academic persistence (Brooms, 2018a). This question examined the use of Black male initiatives and how first-generation, African American male students utilized them to achieve academic persistence at a primarily White institution (Brooms, 2016).

Sub-Question Two

How do first-generation, African American male students describe their academic preparedness when enrolling into a primarily White institution?

The lack of academic preparedness affects many first-generation, African American male students and often hinders opportunities to academically persist (Pratt et al., 2019). When first-generation, African American male students lack academic preparedness, it creates lower academic confidence (Ellis et al., 2019). This question examined first-generation, African

American male students' belief in their academic preparedness when enrolling into a primarily White institution (Pratt et al., 2019).

Sub-Question Three

How does intrusive academic advising affect perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students?

Intrusive academic advising increases opportunities for academic advisors to provide adequate information to increase student learning and avoid academic pitfalls (Johnson et al., 2019). Neglecting academic advising increases the likelihood of early departure from an institution (Elliott, 2020). This question examined the influence of intrusive academic advising and how it assists first-generation, African American male students in achieving academic persistence (Johnson et al., 2019).

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Definitions

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1. *Academic support* - Academic support is defined as an intervention designed to provide instructional methods and educational services that assist students in accelerating skill acquisition and the learning processes needed to succeed academically (Slapac & Coppersmith, 2019).

2. *Academic integration* - Academic integration is defined as activities that encourage meaningful conversations with faculty members and peers during classes, study groups and office hours (Feldman, 2018).

3. *African American* - An African American is a person in the United States (U.S.) of national origin who identifies as Black (Castillo-Montoya, 2017).

4. *Black Male Initiatives* - Black male initiatives is a dedicated learning community for African American males that promotes brotherhood and develops leaders through academic success, personal growth, professional development, and self-responsibility (Brooms, 2016).

5. *First-generation college students* - First-generation college students are students whose parents' highest level of education is a high school diploma or less (Hines et al., 2020a).

6. *Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (HBCUs) - HBCUs are higher education institutions founded in the 1800s established to serve the educational needs of Black Americans (Bracey, 2017).

7. *Intrusive academic advising* - Intrusive academic advising is an action-oriented approach to involving and motivating students to request help when needed (Thomas, 2020).

8. *Maslow's human motivation theory* - Maslow's human motivation theory identifies that people are motivated by the fulfillment of needs such as physiological, safety, belongingness/love, esteem, and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943).

9. *Persistence* - Persistence is defined as continued enrollment (or degree completion) at any higher education institution, including one different from the institution of initial enrollment in the fall (Zemack-Rugar et al., 2021).

10. *Primarily White Institution* - Primarily White institution is a term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Lomotey, 2010).

11. *Sense of Belonging* - Sense of belonging is the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a particular group (Abulof, 2017).

12. *Social integration* - Social integration is defined as activities encouraging informal

    socialization of students, faculty, and staff to encourage academic persistence (Feldman,

    2018).

Summary

Chapter One identified the problem that first-generation, African American male students experience barriers that contribute to low graduation rates while enrolled at four-year PWIs. Chapter One also identified the research conducted as a transcendental, phenomenological qualitative research study. The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest. Chapter One contained information so that the reader can understand the barriers that influence low persistence rates of first-generation, African American male students. The need for this research was supported by the theories and literature that guided this research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review includes an interpretation of historical and current research related to the persistence of first-generation, African American males enrolled at primarily White, four-year institutions and the barriers for African American male students enrolled in four-year institutions across the Midwest. In the introductory section, Maslow's (1943) human motivation theory was discussed. Following the introduction of the theory applied to this study is a systematic review of full-text journal articles, scholarly books, empirical studies, periodicals, and academic and peer-reviewed articles that will provide a holistic perspective of the topic. There is a gap in the literature related to the effectiveness of institutional-derived initiatives to support African American male students enrolled in primarily White institutions (PWIs) and the impact on students' success.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides an in-depth understanding of Maslow's human motivation theory which is utilized to explore persistence's role for first-generation, African American males enrolled at four-year primarily White institutions. Maslow's (1943) human motivation theory provided support for why first-generation, African American males do not persist as their peers from other ethnic groups enrolled in four-year PWIs. Maslow's human motivation theory also provided detailed definitions to assist the reader in understanding why Maslow's human motivation theory was selected and its relevance to this phenomenological study. This theory is essential to understanding first-generation, African American male students' desire and ability to persist at four-year PWIs.

Theory of Human Motivation

The theory of human motivation provides a framework that assisted the researcher in understanding the persistence of first-generation, African American males enrolled at primarily White, four-year institutions. Maslow's hierarchy of needs originated from his paper, "A Theory of Human Motivation," in the journal *Psychological Review* in 1943. In Maslow's (1943) paper, he indicated that people are motivated by attaining basic needs of life, such as food, shelter, and clothing, followed by the need for self-esteem. At the top of the pyramid is self-actualization, the highest level where one can achieve their fullest potential. Maslow's human motivation theory (Maslow's hierarchy of needs) is a motivational theory that comprises of a five-tier model of human conditions described in the hierarchal levels pyramid. The hierarchy of needs is divided into deficiency and growth needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs consists of psychological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs. The basic needs of the hierarchy must be satisfied before the needs higher on the pyramid can be fulfilled (Stoyanov, 2017).

Human motivation is a critical component of a student's desire to persist in higher learning institutions (Patterson, 2021). When motivation is absent from students, their eagerness to persist within an institution diminishes significantly (Moody et al., 2020). The hierarchy of needs identifies a student's basic needs, such as motivation and self-fulfillment (Abbas, 2020). Such needs are identified to directly affect attainable academic achievement (Neen et al., 2019). The result of a learner's motivation will prompt pursuit and desire of high educational attainment, resulting in happiness and fulfillment (Leenknecht et al., 2021).

The theory of human motivation posits that motivation is an amalgamation of internal and external factors. Maslow (1943) explained that every individual has an established set of basic needs. Once an individual's basic needs are met, those needs will no longer motivate one's

behavior. The sense of belongingness, esteem, and psychological needs are also essential components of the theory (Abulof, 2017). According to Maslow, social belonging is fundamental to the human condition (Le Penne, 2017). When the sense of belonging is absent, unappealing effects can occur, creating unhappiness and a decreased desire to achieve (Abulof, 2017).

Human motivation is essential to student engagement in higher education as it assists in accomplishing academic achievement and academic persistence (Wibrowski et al., 2017). Maslow (1943) identified that humans require a hierarchy of needs to attain intellectual achievement. Human motivation to attain is directly related to an individual's values and goals, which can be redirected when one receives external motivation (Burt et al., 2020).

Related Literature

Related literature provides relevant literature to assist in understanding the study area to enhance the knowledge necessary to increase first-generation, African American males' persistence rates at four-year institutions. The selected literature also allows for understanding of the academic and social barriers that often hinder first-generation African American male students' persistence. The following literature also compared historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and primarily White institutions (PWIs). Such comparisons were essential to provide the reader with an understanding of the differences in the educational and social culture that affect academic persistence in first-generation. African American male students.

In addition, it is important to discuss the importance of high influential practices and how the absence of support contributes to lower persistence rates of first-generation, African American male students. Involvement in campus organizations, societal perceptions of African American males, and academic preparedness are also presented and the resources listed are essential to academic persistence. Furthermore, Chapter Two contains information regarding

first-generation, African American males' families and how being a first-generation student affects the college selection process, which may affect academic persistence.

African American Males in Higher Education

To fully understand the academic persistence of African American males who attend PWIs, it is essential to understand the existing barriers (Harper, 2015). PWIs have increased recruiting efforts for students who may be at risk of dropping out before graduation (Tolliver & Miller, 2018). Many of the at-risk students are first-generation, African American males. Research indicates that only 25% of African American men graduate from the institution they enroll in, while 33% of African American men graduate within six years (Shapiro et al., 2017). With such statistics, it is apparent that many elements contribute to such low attrition rates. The academic persistence rates of African American males have become a common problem in PWIs due to pre-existing barriers (Harper, 2015). Current educational system statistics in the United States of America expose an immense educational achievement gap between African American male students and their peers (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). The educational gap in the United States of America between African American male students and their peers increases yearly (Craig, 2016).

A significant number of first-generation, African American males encounter financing difficulties (Strayhorn, 2017). An institution's ability to retain a student is often related to students' access to financial support. Due to the increasing cost of PWIs, first-generation, African American males are often unable to persist due to a lack of financial resources. When HBCUs are compared to primarily White institutions, HBCUs have historically lower cost of attendance, which lessens negative consequences on the students and their families (Hardy et al., 2019). When the cost of attending an institution of higher learning is lower, first-generation, African

American male students have an increased likelihood of academic persistence (Baker et al.,
2020).

Academic preparation and access to support systems also tend to be problematic.
Research has indicated that academic preparation is critical to a student's ability to persist
(Strayhorn, 2017). Without proper academic preparation, first-generation, African American
males are more likely not to complete their college studies (Swanbrow Becker et al., 2017). With
increasing numbers of African American males failing to persist and complete their college
education, further understanding is required to understand the educational persistence gap (Foy,
2018). One factor contributing to the decrease in academic persistence of first-generation,
African American males is the lack of social capital (Simmons, 2019). Brown and Davis (2001)
defined *social capital* as "a resource that can be socially reproduced such as knowledge,
accomplishments, networks and relationships" (p. 4). The absence of social capital significantly
impacts first-generation, African American males' ability to persist and attain academic success
as their peers (Simmons, 2019).

Access and understanding social capital are needed to achieve desired academic
outcomes (Harper & Wood, 2016). Social capital is an essential resource formed and contrived
by ethnic, gender, and social class separation (Dumangane, 2017). Understanding social capital
and other essential resources that can assist in positive academic outcomes can occur through the
building of meaningful relationships, which can be challenging to navigate at primarily White
institutions (Fries-Britt & White-Lewis, 2020).

Proper representation of African American males in higher education is essential to first-
generation, African American male academic persistence. Throughout higher education,
Caucasian faculty members dominate primarily White institutions' educational spaces (Simmons,

2019). Within educational spaces in higher education, African American male students are often hesitant to approach faculty members due to cultural insensitivity displayed by faculty members (Grier-Reed & Wilson, 2016). Research has indicated that increased representation of African American male faculty members will assist first-generation, African American male students' academic outcomes due to African American male faculty relatedness and willingness to understand social capital (Sinanan, 2016). The scarcity of African American male faculty members in higher education suppresses needed relationships and perpetuates low persistence rates of African American male students (Simmons, 2019).

Documented trends have indicated that African American students are being educated by educators whose racial backgrounds differ from theirs now more than ever in history (Mertens, 2018). The current insufficient number of African American male faculty members at primarily White institutions significantly affects the retention rates of African American male students attending primarily White institutions (Reddick et al., 2021). Research concerning African American male students has indicated that the presence of African American male faculty members creates opportunities for mentorship, which has correlated to positive academic persistence for African American male students (Sinanan, 2016). Positive interactions with faculty members provide African American male students with an increased sense of belonging and the desire to triumph academically (Havlik et al., 2020b).

Attending Primarily White Institutions Versus Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

First-generation, African American males who attend primarily White institutions face racism and exclusion from White peers and other institution members (Parker et al., 2016). Examples of racism and exclusion from White peers include racial microaggressions, hyper

surveillance, and racial slurs (Lewis & Shah, 2021). The lack of sense of belonging and discomfort contributes to the withdrawn desire to persist. African American students are often considered less intelligent when compared to their White peers (Hall, 2017). Experiencing uninviting atmospheres and unfair comparisons from faculty, staff, and students can affect a first-generation, African American male student's desire to persist. Haywood and Sewell (2016) stated that African American students encountered psychosocial problems resulting from alienation and lack of support from the general college environment.

Researchers have noted that African American students pose a greater risk of experiencing obstacles, such as racism and bias, at primarily White institutions (Adams & McBrayer, 2020). Campbell et al. (2019) noted that 41% of African American college students indicated that they experience denigrating racial comments, and 59% stated they were subjected to racial insults one or more times. Due to the created obstacles, African American male students need to identify faculty and staff to serve as mentors to navigate the academic and social climate (Hall, 2017).

HBCUs' students possess a greater sense of belonging, contributing to an increased desire to persist (McCall & Castles, 2020). A greater sense of belonging for students who attend HBCUs is displayed by the perceived social support, increased psychological sense of identification, and connectedness exhibited throughout the institution (McCall & Castles, 2020). Attending an HBCU for many African American males is a life-changing encounter (Hilton & Bonner, 2017). When attending an HBCU, first-generation, African American male students experience adequate advising and substantial support from their peers, which is essential to student persistence. Researchers ascertained African American males who attended HBCUs showed increased willingness and motivation to achieve goals (Brown & Dancy, 2017).

When the environment on campus is not welcoming of racial minority and first-generation students, motivation will be a critical component of a student's ability and desire to persist (Kundu, 2019). Enrolling in a four-year, primarily White institution as a first-generation African American male can be challenging. However, academic success can be obtained when African American male students utilize grit, a product of motivation (Warren & Hale, 2020).

High Influential Practices

First-generation, African American male students face many challenges as they endeavor to learn and navigate higher education (Harper, 2015). Significantly influential practices are a strategic approach to encouraging and improving students' persistence, especially first-generation and high-risk students (Conefrey, 2021). Implementing structured activities, such as first-year academic workshops, creates opportunities to enhance learning and increase student engagement by creating meaningful experiences strategically designed to compensate for present gaps in student academic preparedness (Eynon & Gambino, 2016).

Researchers have highlighted the benefits of providing first-generation, African American male students with influential practices embedded in Black Male Initiative groups, such as writing-intensive courses and first-year seminars (Conefrey, 2021). However, incoming first-generation students must receive institutional encouragement for high-influential practice to have the same effect as non-first-generation students (Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2021). As for four-year institutions, research indicates that implementing highly influential practices, such as first-year student workshops and summer bridge programs, will highlight the importance of commitment to persistence (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019).

Institutions of higher learning must be intentional when implementing high influential practices that will meet the needs of first-generation, African American male students (Sinanan,

2016). Over the years, first-generation, African American male students have experienced

numerous hardships that have left many with feelings of rejection and social isolation (Burt et

al., 2019). Unfortunately, African American male students' retention rates are at alarming levels,

as low as 33.8 percent, with more than two-thirds of all African American male students leaving

college before earning a college degree (Allen et al., 2018). High influential practices will

provide helpful information, strategies, and support systems to increase retention and

matriculation rates among African American male college students (Sinanan, 2016).

It is essential to identify factors that inhibit academic persistence because high influential

practices are strategic efforts designed to increase student retention and student satisfaction and

improve student success (Wismath & Newberry, 2019). Positive involvement must occur for

highly-influential practices to effectively impact first-generation, African American male

students (Dorimé-Williams, 2020). Research indicates that Black students are less involved in

traditional, highly-influential practices than their White peers at primarily White institutions,

which is attributable to an unwelcome campus environment.

Having programming that meets the needs of students is essential to creating an

environment where students can have a sense of belonging and a desire to persist academically

(Shah et al., 2021). Influential practices within an institution should be designed to meet students

where they are while strategically strengthening the whole student (Bangeni & Kapp, 2017).

First-generation and continuing-generation students have shown distinct differences in the

support needed to persist academically (Feldman, 2018). With the differences within the student

body between first-generation and continuing-generation students, highly-influential practices

should utilize a combination of social and academic integration (Black, 2018). *Social

integration* is defined as activities encouraging informal socialization of students, faculty, and

staff to encourage academic persistence. *Academic integration* is defined as activities that encourage meaningful conversations with faculty members and peers during classes, study groups, and office hours (Feldman, 2018).

Research concerning student persistence has identified that social and academic integration are building blocks to developing positive academic persistence (Shah et al., 2021). Utilizing social and academic integration within an institution is essential in creating an environment where students desire to engage faculty members, institutional staff, and their peers (Feldman, 2018). Such engagement increases the understanding of social support and often increases student satisfaction concerning their college experience (Bangeni & Kapp, 2017). When highly-influential practices do not meet the needs of students, lower academic performance and increased stress levels often occur, negatively affecting student confidence and academic persistence (Shah et al., 2021).

Involvement in Campus Organizations

Experiences of first-generation, African American male students enrolled at primarily White institutions differ from those of their White peers (Hines et al., 2020a). Campus involvement is an essential element that provides African American male students the opportunity to connect to a culturally-validating environment (Druery & Brooms, 2019). Druery and Brooms stated that a culturally validating environment provides first-generation, African American male students an opportunity to receive encouragement and advisement from peers and mentors. Encouragement and advisement are received when first-generation, African American males are involved in Black, male-centered campus organizations, increasing a students' sense of belonging and desire to persist.

Creating Black male initiatives at four-year, primarily White institutions provides an opportunity for first-generation, African American males to have a space where they can receive encouragement from mentors and other first-generation, African American male students (Brooms, 2016). Providing an opportunity on campus where African American males can access essential academic support increases student motivation and a sense of belonging. Research findings suggest that human motivation is interconnected with the sense of belonging and a student's desire to persist. Motivation and support are necessary components for students to progress within a four-year institution. Adequate support must be provided by the college and university if an institution desires to retain its students.

Druery and Brooms (2019) have shown the importance of developing African American cultural familiarity through their research. Druery and Brooms' research findings indicated the following:

> African American male-centered organizations assisted in developing African American men's familiarity, advance connections to culturally enriching environments, and enhance culturally relevant knowledge. These experiences provided first-generation African American male students a culturally validating environment that provided opportunities for bonding with other African American male students, which provided access to resources that assisted in developing social capital and cultural capital (p. 334).

Involvement in Black male organizations for first-generation, African American male students enrolled at a four-year primarily White institution is essential in achieving academic persistence and graduation.

Campus organizations provide additional academic and social support that assist African American males in navigating higher education while encouraging academic persistence

(Simmons, 2019). Black, male, Greek-letter organizations provide African American male students with relatedness to college, influencing positive campus academic and social engagement (Miller & Bryan, 2020). Through Black, male, Greek letter organizations, African American male students can learn the importance of academic excellence through the support from their fraternal peers (Chambers, 2016). The purpose of Black, male, Greek letter organizations is to establish camaraderie to supply African American male students' resources and support through their educational endeavors to attain access into American society (Chambers, 2017). Throughout the years, Black, male, Greek letter organizations have assisted African American male students in understanding the importance of achieving success by emphasizing the importance of academic persistence and providing support networks (Miller & Bryan, 2020).

Black, male, Greek-letter organizations provide a space where African American male students can receive guidance from brother figures who hold them accountable for their academic and social actions (Chambers, 2016). Such organizations provide a sense of belonging and positive guidance, which is necessary to achieve academic persistence (Simmons, 2019). Spaces on campus, such as Black, male, Greek-letter organizations, provide African American male students a space where they can receive personal and academic uplift from individuals who often share a similar background and understand the challenges present when pursuing academic success (Gross et al., 2014).

Societal Perceptions of African American Males

Perceptions of African American male students enrolled at primarily White institutions can significantly influence their desire to persist academically (Fuller, 2017). Many first-generation, African American males encounter race-related experiences, which often cause

psychological fatigue (Brooms, 2016). The psychological fatigue that first-generation, African American male students endure is often related to the institutions' preconceived perceptions of their academic ability. The perceptions often contaminate a first-generation, African American male's collegiate experience, creating discomfort and a decline in the sense of belonging, which usually affects their desire to persist.

Research indicates that societal perceptions of African American male students can affect African American college students (Fuller, 2017). Institutions' negative societal perceptions convey to African American, first-generation students that they are not valued as their peers. Having an environment that permits a sense of student devaluation will often increase student dissatisfaction, including the desire to engage in necessary academic resources designed to assist student retention.

Negative societal perceptions of African American males can find their way into the classroom with teachers who cannot relate to their African American students' needs due to their limited perception of African American students and their background (Davidson et al., 2020). When societal perceptions enter the classroom and influence teachers responsible for disseminating information, African American students will lose trust, often affecting their desire to engage in positive relationships later in their educational career (Yeager et al., 2017). African American males encounter extreme barriers that stem from societal perceptions of African American males (Leath et al., 2019). The societal perceptions of African American males create obstacles of systemic discrimination, which in many ways contribute to African American males having the lowest levels of academic engagement (Dixson & Gentzis, 2021).

Research indicates that societal perceptions of African American males cause them to experience increased discrimination in educational settings, which affects their academic

engagement at higher levels than their peers (Dixson & Gentzis, 2021). When negative

perceptions and racial discrimination is present, it conveys to African American male students

that they are not valued as their peers (Fuller, 2017). Negative, societal perceptions of African

American male students have an obstructive impact on their intellectual ability and often hinder

African American male students' academic performance.

With the present challenges within the educational system in America, many African

American males have adopted the negative, societal perception that academic success is not

attainable (Owens et al., 2016). The negative societal culture of anti-intellectualism has created

the perception that academic success will cause a loss of acceptance within their community

amongst peers, which has resulted in many African American male students ignoring the

importance of education and accepting societal norms (Butler-Barnes et al., 2015). The

acceptance of anti-intellectualism has negatively affected African American male students' desire

to embrace the quest for knowledge and to persist academically in various academic

environments (Johnson, 2018).

First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students are more likely to be students of color (Means & Pyne,

2017). Research indicates that first-generation, African American male students are more likely

to originate from low-income households (Havlik et al., 2020b). African American, first-

generation students often lack the social and cultural capital their peers attain from parents who

attended and graduated from college. The lack of social and cultural capital influences first-

generation, African American males' experiences in forms of culture shock, systematic racism,

and isolation.

The atmosphere that first-generation, African American males encounter and endure often compels students to seek support from systems within the institution (Fries-Britt & White-Lewis, 2020). Typical forms of support that have provided satisfactory results for first-generation, African American males are mentors and peers. With increased numbers of first-generation, African American males attending primarily White institutions, support systems are necessary to encourage perseverance and persistence (Brooms & Davis, 2017). African American male student success is predicated on having positive peer associations and committed mentors who can provide the emotional support necessary while understanding their lived experiences to persist at a four-year, primarily White institution (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Researchers provide connections that African American, first-generation male students who commit to mentors and utilize academic support systems improve their academic performance and persistence (Strayhorn, 2017).

First-generation students are students whose parents did not attain a college degree from an institution of higher learning (Ma & Shea, 2021). Being a first-generation African American male college student presents unique challenges when adequate support is not present (Hines et al., 2020b). The academic and social support required for first-generation students is often lacking from institutions of higher learning due to the prioritization of independent culture (Phillips et al., 2020). Many first-generation students experience cultural mismatch (Hines et al., 2020b). *Cultural mismatch* is defined as the misalignment between cultural values and independent, institutional values experienced (Stephens et al., 2012). Cultural mismatch, when not addressed, will lead to dreadful experiences and low academic outcomes for first-generation students (Phillips et al., 2020).

Past research indicates that the interdependence of first-generation students leads to adverse educational outcomes such as lower grade point averages and low aptness to obtain college resources throughout their educational journey (Chang et al., 2020). Developing support structures that encourage academic growth through community engagement will increase retention and academic growth (Lucas, 2018).

First-generation college students experience a new world filled with new challenges and experiences. The experience of a first-generation college student when entering unknown territory can be very frightening, coupled with noticeable pressure, apprehension, and unfamiliarity of higher education and its processes (Hines et al., 2020a). Research has indicated that first-generation college students do not receive the same support as non-first-generation students during and after college selection (Johnson, 2019). Many first-generation students lack essential support from family, which can directly affect the student's college selection decision (Means & Pyne, 2017). As a result, many first-generation students select the wrong institution to attend, significantly affecting their ability to be academically pertinacious. Due to limited first-generation knowledge of higher education, they generally complete less credit hours than continuing generation college students (Warren & Hale, 2020).

Out of the 16 million students enrolled in higher education, first-generation attendees make up a quarter of students enrolled in the United States (Johnson, 2019). When first-generation, African American male students select an institution that does not correctly align with their needs, struggles can occur, creating challenges affecting their academic progress and success (Havlik et al., 2020b). Improper selection of an institution of higher learning can often explain low academic success, retention, and graduation rates among first-generation college students (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020).

Institutional characteristics and resources significantly impact a student's ability to persist academically (Patterson, 2021). Many first-generation students are introduced to and select institutions that do not have the ability or resources to provide adequate support for their needs as they transition into a new academic atmosphere (Burt et al., 2020). Research indicates that first-generation students often achieve lower grades and complete fewer credits than continuing-generation students (Cataldi et al., 2018).

Academic Preparedness

Academic preparedness will often determine if a first-generation, African American male will have the ability and desire to persist at a four-year, primarily White institution. First-generation, African American students often lack academic confidence due to academic preparation during their K-12 academic years (Pratt et al., 2019). Research indicates that first-generation, African American males choose less academically rigorous coursework due to a lack of academic confidence. Many factors contribute to the lack of academic confidence once enrolled at primarily White institutions. Interactions with professors, academic support staff, and peers can contribute to African American males' low academic confidence (Ellis et al., 2019).

African American, male, first-generation students often feel alienated and discriminated against by White faculty members (Neville & Parker, 2017). The feeling of alienation and discrimination discourages many first-generation, African American male students from seeking additional interactions with professors and campus community members that may have the ability and resources necessary to increase student confidence, which is essential to academic success and persistence (Fries-Britt, 2017). A student's academic experiences before enrolling into a four-year institution substantially affect the students' understanding, ability, and desire to commit to persisting to achieve the goal of graduating once enrolled (Savage et al., 2019).

Although many African American male students maintain negative experiences in K-12, urban environments, the negative experiences at four-year, primarily White institutions also contribute to the highest attrition rates among all races (Strayhorn, 2017). Campus racial configuration and interactions influence African American male students' desire to commit to the process of persisting.

Understanding the importance of academic preparedness can be traced to the days of segregation when African American teachers committed to the holistic approach of teaching African American, male students amid racial prejudice and discrimination (Lund, 2019). During the time of segregation, African American educators committed to practices that often occurred outside of the classroom to provide resources that assisted in the academic preparation of African American students. Since the time of segregation, the understanding of academic preparation has remained constant, being defined as an attained level of preparation necessary to enroll in an institution of higher learning (Hines et al., 2020b). Unfortunately, with current retention strategies, African American males continue to have a much lower graduation rate than their Caucasian peers (Ottley & Ellis, 2019).

African American males have increased access to higher education than during segregation, with nearly 1.2 million African American males enrolled in an institution of higher learning (Ottley & Ellis, 2019). However, with increased access to higher education, research has indicated that African American males enroll into institutions of higher learning less prepared for college-level work than their peers (Atuahene, 2021). A study conducted by Atuahene (2021) identified that roughly 40% of African American male students were not academically prepared for college, with roughly 40% of African American males dropping out of college due to the absence of social support and academic preparation.

The absence of academic college preparation can be directly associated with unsatisfactory success rates of pre-college academic work and adequate access to academic knowledge (Havlik et al., 2020a). Vital academic knowledge is often obtained in a pre-college setting by disseminating information by schoolteachers and advisors. However, when African American, male students encounter negative teacher perceptions, it will have a dissenting impact on their desire to strive for academic preparedness (Crumb et al., 2021).

Institutions of Higher Learning

Institutions of higher learning, such as four-year, primarily White institutions, have the unique ability and resources to create strategies that can improve a campus environment for first-generation, African American male students (Stephens et al., 2014). It is the institutions' responsibility to provide an environment that provides adequate support structures that can enhance a student's sense of belonging through employing supportive faculty and staff (Eveland, 2020). Providing adequate resources is an essential component required to assist in academic persistence.

Understanding the unique barriers of first-generation, African American male students will assist institutions in their quest to improve the low retention rates of African American males (Patterson, 2021). The struggle to persist for first-generation, African American males can influence academic burnout (Kundu, 2019). Academic burnout typically occurs when students cannot integrate into needed student support resources on campus. Research indicates that college retention requires an exchange between a student's desire to integrate academically and socially within a higher education environment (Kahu & Lodge, 2018). When an institution's culture is unwelcoming and lacks sufficient support for first-generation, African American male students, institutions pose a significant risk of attaining low retention rates. Institutions must

focus on retention and attrition, which is of great concern for African American males in higher education (Brooms, 2016).

In higher education, attainment of retention, attrition, and student persistence are of great importance for institutions of higher learning. Student retention involves a combination of student, institutional, and external factors that contribute to the matriculation of students (Kahu & Lodge, 2018). Institutions of higher learning define *student retention* as the perpetual enrollment of a student from one year to another (Cotton et al., 2017). Student retention and persistence are essential components to an institution's success (Burke, 2019). Colleges and universities are only deemed successful if they can attain acceptable retention rates. Attainment of acceptable retention rates will often determine an institution's ability to achieve financial stability, including why student persistence is paramount to an institution's financial planning, as tuition and fees often drive an institution's income.

The campus climate of an institution substantially influences first-generation, African American males' sense of belonging and desire to matriculate within an institution (Museus & Ravello, 2021). Research indicates that African American males have a stronger sense of belonging within HBCUs due to higher positive interactions with peers and other members of the institution when compared to primarily White institutions (Brooms, 2019). African American, male students' experiences in primarily White institutions often present unnecessary challenges that affect academic success, sense of belonging, and academic persistence (Jones, 2020). Research has indicated that many primarily White institutions do not possess an environment conducive to minority students' sense of belonging due to racism and racial discrimination (Campbell et al., 2019). Without a conducive and supportive environment for the first-

generation, African American male student, institutions of higher learning will often fail in retaining them (Malott et al., 2019).

Success in college is often predicated upon student satisfaction and an institution's ability to connect with students enrolled (Patterson, 2021). For first-generation, African American male students, academic performance can be impacted by a sense of alienation when attending a primarily White institution, negatively impacting grade point averages despite academic ability (Campbell et al., 2019). However, when first-generation, African American male students attend HBCUs, research has shown increased engagement support and student satisfaction, which are essential to positive student matriculation and persistence (Shappie & Debb, 2019).

HBCUs and primarily White institutions have substantial differences regarding the academic persistence of first-generation, African American male students (Gross et al., 2019). HBCUs possess a mission of ethnic uplift, including the ability to connect and increase the social capital of historically-marginalized groups while providing significant academic and social encounters for African American students (Crewe, 2017). Research has indicated that HBCUs are more effective in facilitating an environment where first-generation, African American male students are not afraid to question professors and peers when guidance is needed (Burt et al., 2019).

Academic and emotional support are essential elements that institutions of higher learning must provide to first-generation, African American male students to assist in achieving academic resoluteness (Shapiro et al., 2017). Research has indicated that the absence of emotional support can impose stress, negatively influencing the academic performance of first-generation, African American male students (Brooms, 2019). A taxing environment often requires first-generation, African American male students to administer additional effort to

achieve correlative academic attainment as their White peers (Simmons & Smith, 2020). The additional effort required to achieve desired academic goals may cause many first-generation, African American male students academic frustration and the desire to quit (Patterson, 2021).

Adequate access to academic support will improve first-generation, African American male students' academic trajectory, providing them the proper academic instruments to matriculate and persist (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2018). When academic support is provided in a welcoming environment, first-generation, African American male students are more inclined to embrace the provided support frequently (Means & Pyne, 2017). Institutions of higher learning must prioritize creating supportive and effective academic environments to encourage positive academic persistence (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2018).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

HBCUs are adept at creating an atmosphere that seeks to develop the whole student through education, faith, and community (Crewe, 2017). HBCUs provide a nurturing environment where first-generation, African American males can thrive, receiving the support necessary for student persistence (Goings, 2017). HBCUs are considered a refuge for first-generation, African American males due to the positive interactions with faculty and staff. Attending an institution that encourages positive faculty and student interactions is essential to student success and improves students' sense of belonging. Positive interaction can produce many advantages, such as increased academic and campus engagement. HBCUs comprise 3% of higher education institutions but are responsible for 16% of African Americans with a bachelor's degree (Goings, 2017).

The HBCU environment typically employs faculty members committed to providing an encouraging atmosphere that promotes personal difference and opportunities to explore Black

manhood issues (Goings, 2017). First-generation, African American males who attend HBCUs report sufficient opportunities to engage in positive relationships with faculty and their peers (Johnson, 2019). However, first-generation, African American males who attend primarily White institutions often experience isolation and alienation in academic and social spaces within the institution. Many scholars believe that HBCUs are a better fit for first-generation, African American males (Brown & Sacco-Bene, 2018).

In the history of higher education, HBCUs hold an unparalleled place in the education of African American males (Harrington & Thomas, 2018). No institutions within higher education, other than HBCUs, have undertaken the responsibility for educating African Americans. HBCUs provide first-generation, African American male students a unique opportunity to engage in an educational environment where they are the majority ethnic group while pursuing their education, which results in increased engagement compared to PWI's (Shappie & Debb, 2019).

Prior research concerning HBCUs revealed that the practical lessons used to educate African American male students provide a grounded environment that has empowered and improved the desire to persist academically (Gasman et al., 2017). The practical and diverse lessons disseminated in HBCUs were created to develop the whole student, providing necessities to achieve high performance during and after college (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). From their inception, HBUCs have been committed to uplifting and nourishing first-generation, African American male students in areas beyond academics.

HBCUs are unique due to the purpose of their creation (Bracey, 2017). HBCUs were established to educate African Americans due to the laws of segregation that outlawed African Americans to attend school with their White peers. HBCUs have provided and continue to provide first-generation, African American male students the opportunity and support needed to

be academically successful (Gordon et al., 2021). HBCUs have demonstrated their commitment to first-generation, African American male students, unlike some primarily White institutions who have not shown consistent commitment or interest in African American students (Bracey, 2017). HBCUs have demonstrated their effectiveness by creating nurturing environments that have enhanced student satisfaction and consistently enhanced African American, male students' self-concept while also providing students holistic academic and social support (Hardy et al., 2019).

Research suggests that the nurturing environment created within HBCUs produce better academic development and increased student satisfaction (Palmer & Williams, 2021). Academic development and student satisfaction significantly influence the matriculation of first-generation, African American male students (Boykin et al., 2018). HBCUs often have African American male faculty and staff members who are approachable mentors who assist first-generation, African American male students to academically and socially integrate (Hilton & Bonner, 2017). HBCUs often have a higher percentage of African American, professional, male representation than primarily White institutions (Scott & Wiggan, 2015). Having an increased presence of professional, African American males on campus positively influences first-generation, African American male students (Webb et al., 2018).

Primarily White Institutions

Most predominantly, White institutions have a history of excluding African American males. The history of predominantly White institutions influences the current climate and practices at predominantly White institutions (Leath & Chavous, 2017). The legacy of racial discrimination against African American male students at predominantly White institutions blocked many from attending these institutions (Hussain & Jones, 2021). Researchers have noted

that many first-generation, African American males continue to face racial discrimination and unfair practices years after desegregation at predominantly White institutions (Black & Bimper, 2020). It is essential to acknowledge the racial issues that African American, first-generation male students face and how it affects their desire to engage in campus events. Lack of campus engagement and peer socialization harms a student's desire to persist.

Educational opportunity programs were created to provide access to first-generation and low-income students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds (McElroy & Armesto, 1998). Research indicated that educational opportunity programs did increase diversity by admitting first-generation, African American male students (Winograd et al., 2018). However, students continued to encounter hostile racial atmospheres and experiences on campus, which affected the desire to persist (Means & Pyne., 2017). Through educational opportunity programs, first-generation, African American males receive tailored academic advising to increase students' ability to persist. Research suggests that first-generation, African American males who participate in educational opportunities at four-year primarily White institutions graduate at higher rates (Winograd et al., 2018). However, first-generation, African American males who do not participate in educational opportunity programs at primarily White institutions graduate at lower rates.

When African American, male students attend primarily White institutions, they often encounter stressful circumstances that affect their physical and emotional well-being, which greatly impacts their desire to matriculate academically (Oliver et al., 2019). Many African American, male students face negative academic and social obstacles while enrolled at primarily White institutions (Haywood & Sewell, 2016). Haywood & Sewell findings indicated that PWIs are not prepared to meet the specific academic needs of African American, male students. The

lack of institutional preparation can be attributed to the lack of resources and understanding of what is needed for African American, male students' personal and academic growth required for successful academic completion (Lucas, 2018).

The current percentage of African American male students who attend PWIs and graduate with a four-year degree is historically low (Lucas, 2018). Research indicates that many factors contribute to the negative experiences that African American males face on campus. One of the troubling results indicated that African American male students receive intentional discrimination from professors, who students traditionally look to for guidance (Griffith et al., 2019). Such troubling results highlight that PWI's lack the support systems needed to create an environment that will aid in first-generation, African American male students' academic matriculation and graduation (Ellis et al., 2019).

Family

Parents and guardians of first-generation, African American male students play an essential role in developing aspirations to attend a post-secondary institution (Elliott et al., 2018). Although the family unit of first-generation, African American males promote attending a post-secondary institution, most first-generation African American male families provide limited assistance in the college selection process and understanding financial aid forms. Research indicates that many first-generation, African American male students' families encourage them to attend institutions that provide generous scholarships and are close to home. However, being close to home for many first-generation, African American males can distract and affect their ability and desire to persist (Garza & Fullerton, 2018).

Research indicates that first-generation, African American male students are less likely to originate from a two-parent household (Plunkett et al., 2016). The family construct plays a vital

role in a students' ability to persist due to economic disparities. The economic disparities that some first-generation, African American male students face compel many to work off-campus to lessen the financial burden of being a first-generation college student. The commitment of working and attending college can limit a student's time to fully commit to academic studies, which affects a student's ability to persist.

The impact of influential relationships with family members and mentors who often provide family support greatly influences first-generation, African American students' desire to attend institutions of higher learning (Hines et al., 2020a). Influential relationships with family and those who provide family support assist in building a student's desire and confidence, which is needed to become a first-generation college student who persists (Covarrubias et al., 2019). As first-generation students embark on a new and foreign journey, they often carry the weight of leaving family members, often referred to as family achievement guilt (Covarrubias et al., 2019). Covarrubias et al. suggested that family achievement guilt affects many first-generation students' desire and ability to persist academically.

Parents of African American, first-generation male students play an essential function by promoting the idea of pursuing higher education to their sons to influence the desire to achieve educational and career goals (Elliott et al., 2018). However, students often use examples of their current situation and their parents' lives as motivation to pursue higher education and to generate opportunities for their future. The motivation that first-generation, African American male students possess must accompany adequate academic and social support mechanisms to encourage academic persistence throughout their educational journey (Huerta et al., 2018). Furthermore, Huerta et al. suggested that the support students receive assists in navigating family and personal barriers that may exist while pursuing higher education.

Student Success Rates

Student success rates at primarily White institutions and HBCUs differ due to the cultural environment and philosophies employed to encourage persistence of first-generation, African American male students (Strayhorn, 2017). First-generation, African American male students benefit from support systems designed to meet their unique needs generated from their lived experiences (Brown & Sacco-Bene, 2018). Research relating to African American males and persistence revealed that peer influences, faculty interactions, and a welcoming campus environment contribute to achieving favorable student success rates.

There are distinct differences between HBCUs and PWIs and how first-generation, African American male students perceive them (Mobley, 2017). Historically, African American male students have experienced low persistence rates (35%) compared with other demographics (Musu-Gilllette et al., 2017). Understanding and identifying the support systems necessary is critical to first-generation students' academic performance, persistence, and completion (Castillo-Montoya, 2017). However, HBCUs report positive interactions with campus community members (Brown & Sacco-Bene, 2018). Positive interactions and well-strategized academic plans create the atmosphere for positive student success.

Student success can reshape African American male students' experiences on campus. Creating holistic academic advising plans will create opportunities to equip African American male students with the necessary skills and support to succeed academically (Fernandez et al., 2017). Creating programs will allow African American male students to develop harmonious relationships with the academic community, inviting the opportunity to develop strategic relationships and partnerships that will enhance the intellectual experience of African American males throughout their academic career. Research has indicated that creating an environment that

establishes a sense of accountability is required to encourage student success (Simmons & Smith, 2020).

Establishing an environment that African American male students desire to be a part of requires innovation from the institution, combined with commitment from the student and the institution to improve persistence rates of first-generation, African American male students (Schwartz et al., 2018). Relationships are essential tools that affect first-generation, African American male students' academic success; the right relationships with mentors on campus can substantially impact students' understanding of what is required to be a successful student (Said & Feldmeyer, 2022). HBCUs have shown their commitment to first-generation, African American male students by implementing strategies to create a nurturing and supportive environment that is vital to their academic success (Hilton & Bonner, 2017).

Professors are essential to the academic success of first-generation African American male students (Fries-Britt & White-Lewis., 2020). Professors who engage in personalized attention and create collaborative learning environments encourage African American male students to set the bar high to attain academic success (Irvine, 2019). Proper selection of an institution of higher learning is an essential element required to achieve student success (Roscoe, 2015). Selecting an institution to attend is often predicated upon circumstances rather than the right academic and social fit to provide adequate support for first-generation, African American male students (Hilton & Bonner, 2017). Appropriate advising from high school guidance counselors can aid in selecting an institution that provides an appropriate fit for first-generation, African American male students to receive adequate support that will assist in achieving academic persistence (Museus & Ravello, 2021).

Summary

The literature posits distinct differences between the persistence of African American males who attend primarily White institutions compared to Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Researchers indicated that students involved in campus activities, such as student and academic clubs and other organizations, are more inclined to possess a stronger sense of belonging, influencing a student's desire to persist within the institution. A sense of belonging is a critical component of a student's ability to persist in an institution of higher learning. When the sense of belonging is absent, a student's desire to persist is often eradicated, resulting in lower academic performance and decreased interaction with academic staff and peers. Numerous studies have suggested a correlation between the sense of belonging, persistence, and a student's ability to remain academically eligible, which is required to maintain financial assistance (Strayhorn, 2017).

Society's perception of first-generation, African American male college students influences an institution's strategies to provide adequate resources to assist in student retention. Institutions have admissions guidelines to which all students are held. However, many institutions offer programs for first-generation students, which require them to attend summer bridge programs for formal admission to the institution (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). The goal is to allow students with academic potential to attend an institution with support to assist first-generation students in overcoming the academic challenges present. Research showed that trust and an established relationship are critical for first-generation, African American males to seek institutional support (Brooms & Davis, 2017).

Strategically designed, high-influential practices are critical for first-generation, African American male students' success due to the absence of cultural capital. Researchers found that

onboarding seminars for first-generation students are effective (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). Seminars that include study skills and time management significantly influence students' academic success and retention rates. Research showed that student-derived initiatives are most effective (Spiridon et al., 2020). Providing a vastly different student experience, HBCUs have historically provided unique and tailored support for first-generation, African American male students by implementing Black male initiatives that utilize university executive staff and faculty. The HBCU approach is grounded in history and culture. Research has shown that first-generation, African American male students enrolled at HBCUs are more inclined to persist when support is strategically designed and connected to the notion of belonging (Mwangi, 2016).

There is a gap in the literature related to the effectiveness of institutional-derived initiatives to support African American male students enrolled in primarily White institutions and the impact on students' success. Another gap in the literature is the impact that self-perception and external support has on a student's ability to persist. The theory of human motivation will address the gap in the literature concerning the importance of self-perception and external support and the correlation with the academic persistence of first-generation, African American male students. This chapter also supports how African American male students leverage Black male initiative experiences and resources available at the institution to improve academic persistence.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

To explore first-generation, male, African American and Black undergraduate students' persistence in PWI in the Midwest United States, a qualitative research methodology was used. This phenomenological study examined academic persistence and its role in first-generation, African American males enrolled at predominately White, four-year institutions, utilizing Maslow's (1943) human motivation theory. The research focused on first-generation, African American male students' experiences that influence their persistence. This chapter also examined the transcendental, phenomenological, qualitative research approach and questions, participants, and data collection, while providing the steps required to ensure this study's ethical consideration and trustworthiness.

Research Design

In this section, the decisions to use qualitative methodology and the research design of transcendental phenomenology were explained. This study examined the perceptions and lived experiences among first-generation, African American male students utilizing a transcendental phenomenological qualitative research approach. Maslow's (1943) human motivation theory provided the theoretical framework for this research study and was utilized to describe the role persistence plays for first-generation, African American males enrolled at four-year institutions. Maslow's human motivation theory was applied to this study to address how first-generation, African American male students' basic needs must be met for academic persistence to be achieved (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenology originated from Greek promulgation meaning "to bring to light" (Hartwig & Barton, 2014, p.148). Phenomenology is a method traditionally utilized in

philosophy that provides superior and valuable knowledge in psychology (Wertz et al., 2011).

This phenomenological study examined academic persistence and its role in first-generation,

African American males enrolled at primarily White, four-year institutions, while utilizing

Maslow's (1943) human motivation theory. A quantitative research methodology does not align

with the purpose of this selected research study. The purpose of this research study was not to

confirm or test a theory or hypothesis; rather, the purpose was to understand academic

persistence in first-generation, African American male students enrolled at four-year primarily

White institutions. Quantitative research also focuses on numerical and statistical analyses to

establish relationships or comparisons. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This statistical process,

however, fails to address individual experiences and understandings. Therefore, a qualitative

methodological approach was used.

Qualitative researchers seek to transform the world by allowing the researcher to observe

participants in their natural setting, providing opportunities to engage in interviews and

conversations (Court et al., 2018). Through such engagement, the researcher engaged in learning

and understanding the participants' experiences and understandings to transform the world

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth, qualitative researchers aim to

understand participants' experiences, both as individuals and as a group, and they aim to

highlight the participants' voices. Due to the focus of understanding undergraduate male African

American students' persistence in PWIs, qualitative methodology is the most appropriate choice.

The selected research method was designed to achieve a scholarly and thorough understanding of

the phenomenon (Vagle, 2018).

Phenomenology is a passageway that allows the researcher to access the world pre-

reflectively (Van Manen, 2014). Since phenomenology is a human science and a philosophical

method of questioning, it was fitting to utilize the selected research method as I sought to identify what barriers first-generation, African American male students encountered and how they conquered them. A phenomenological study requires the selected participants to fully reflect upon their lived academic experiences in detail (Bhattacharya, 2017). The selected research method enabled me to capture and understand the lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students in their pursuit to persist, while noting the resources accessible and not accessible to them throughout their educational journey.

Transcendental phenomenology was selected for this study due to the focus of the participants' lived experiences and less of a focus on the researcher's interpretations (Moustakas, 1994). A transcendental phenomenology study allowed the participants' voices and experiences to be heard throughout the research. This qualitative research provided an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences (Paley, 2016). The selected phenomenological approach captured the true essence of the participants lived experiences and was shared within the research. When a qualitative research design is selected, the researcher can collect data in the natural setting of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Engaging participants in their natural settings allowed the researcher to gather information by employing multiple methods to assemble various forms of data rather than depending on a single data source (Patton, 2015).

Other qualitative research design methods were not selected for this research study due to their deficiency in highlighting what experience means for the individuals who have had the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology was ideal because it is the first method of knowledge and eliminates prejudgment. Phenomenological research design provides a detailed and comprehensive description of the meanings of the experiences investigated by the researcher.

Research Questions

Research questions are essential to the exploration process of qualitative research (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018). Qualitative research questions substantiate the trustworthiness of qualitative findings within conducted research (Court et al., 2018). Developing research questions significantly affects the research process (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). This study utilized the following central question and sub-questions to guide the transcendental, phenomenological study.

Central Research Question

What are the perceptions and lived experiences of first generation, African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest?

Sub-Question One

What role did participation in Black Male Initiatives play in first-generation, African American male academic persistence in a Primarily White Institution (PWI)?

Sub-Question Two

How do first-generation, African American male students describe their academic preparedness when enrolling into a primarily White institution?

Sub-Question Three

How does intrusive academic advising affect perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students?

Setting and Participants

In this study, the setting and participants provided adequate data to assist me in understanding the participants' lived experiences. The following section provided in-depth

information concerning the setting and geographical location of the research study. In addition, the age range of the participants and the method for selecting participants is discussed.

Setting

For this research study, the setting was a four-year, private institution, Odonald Hill University (pseudonym), located in the Midwest region of the United States. The institution's population is roughly 5,000 students, with 330 full-time professors and 500 full-time staff. The student demographics consist of 69% White, 7% Asian, 4% Black, and 15% Hispanic (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). The average age of the participant for this study was 19 years old. This site was selected for this study due to its proximity to an urban center with many first-generation, African American males to achieve the desired sample size for this transcendental, phenomenological study. The site was also selected due to its national ranking of 38 and history of enrolling first-generation students compared to other institutions within the region.

Participants

The participants for this study included 12 first-generation, African American males currently enrolled at a PWI in the Midwest United States. The sample size selected was suitable for a transcendental, phenomenological qualitative study. To align with transcendental, phenomenological research, a purposive, homogeneous sampling strategy was used. Purposive sampling refers to the deliberate selection of participants based on their potential to explain a particular theme or phenomenon (Espedal et al., 2022). Purposive sampling was selected because all participants must have a personal encounter with the phenomenon and be inclined to articulate their experiences in great detail (Patton, 2015).

To follow the sampling processes, the participants met the following criteria. The participants in this study must:

a) be males enrolled in a PWI in the Midwest United States who graduated from the metropolitan public school system,

b) identify as African American,

c) be first-generation males whose ages range from 18-22,

d) be considered one of the following academic classifications: second semester first-year student, sophomore, junior, or senior or must have graduated from a PWI, and

e) be enrolled in various academic studies within the last five years.

All the selected participants completed at least one academic semester and demonstrated persistence, which is a key experience required for this study. Each criterion listed was essential to engage in inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researcher Positionality

The subject for this research was selected due to the increase in enrollment of first-generation, African American males into four-year institutions (Simmons & Smith, 2020). Through my years in higher education administration, I was privileged to witness increased enrollment numbers of first-generation, African American male students. However, I noticed that many first-generation, African American male students were encountering barriers that often inhibited them from experiencing the academic persistence of their peers in other ethnic groups. In this phenomenological study, I sought to identify the required academic and social resources that will increase the academic persistence of first-generation, African American male students to increase the retention and graduation rates of African American, male, first-generation students. Prior research has indicated that African American male persistence rates and

completion rates are lowest among all racial groups in higher education in the United States, with

33 percent earning a bachelor's degree within six years (Brooms et al., 2018).

The selected method examined first-generation, African American male students and

their lived experiences. Social constructivism allowed me to develop a subjective meaning to the

experiences while looking at the complexity of views to highlight areas of change to increase the

academic persistence of first-generation, African American male students. Social constructivism

also allowed me to examine the relationships between the learners, teachers, and peers within the

educational community (McNamee et al., 2020).

Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework selected to guide this research study was social

constructionism. *Social constructivism* is an interpretive framework that allows researchers to

understand the world and develop subjective meaning to experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Social constructivism is a worldview where individuals research an understanding of

environments where they live and work. Experiences often determine the motivation required for

African American male students to academically persist at a primarily white institution (Havlik

et al., 2022). Social constructivism supported Maslow's (1943) human motivation theory by

connecting first-generation, African American male students' lived experiences to the motivation

required to persist academically.

As the researcher, I examined various views concerning the persistence of first-

generation, African American male students through varied and multiple meanings. The research

goal was to utilize participants' views and lived experiences to create strategies based on first-

generation, African American male students' needs to increase academic persistence in higher

education. An additional research goal was to encourage higher learning institutions to discern

the challenges that first-generation, African American males encounter when enrolling in their institutions.

Social constructivism allowed the opportunity to present participants with broad and general questions, creating the opportunity to construct the meaning concerning academic persistence. My background as the researcher shaped the interpretation throughout the research as I positioned myself within the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was essential to place myself within the research to fully understand first-generation, African American male students' lived experiences and barriers as they endeavor to persist in higher education.

Philosophical Assumptions

Creswell (2014) stated five philosophical assumptions in qualitative research: ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological. An ontological assumption is defined as an individual's point of view of the world, which creates their reality (Tsang et al., 2019). An epistemological assumption is defined as the researchers' knowledge and understanding of information. It also affected how I positioned myself as the researcher. An axiological assumption places interest on the researcher's values and moral stance in ethics. Disclosing a researcher's ethical stance is important as it provides the reader an opportunity to judge if the reported research data is accurate and reliable (Tsang et al., 2019).

Ontological Assumption

Ontology is the study of being. My ontological assumption is understanding the nature of existence while analyzing the world I live in (Crotty, 2003). Through research, ontology is utilized to investigate participants' thoughts, interceptions, and meanings. Research methods and techniques, such as interviews and surveys, were utilized to understand first-generation, African American male students' inner thoughts and sense of belonging. In this research, the researcher

assumed that distinct elements affect academic persistence such as prior academic preparedness, students' sense of belonging, identification, and the utilization of academic support systems. Such identification is necessary to close the gap in African American male academic persistence in the future.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemology is the investigation of the nature of knowledge as well as its potential, extent, and general influence (Crotty, 2003). My epistemological assumption is that knowledge is attained through listening and personal experiences. Epistemology is considered a foundational philosophical piece for determining what category of knowledge is credible, including its legitimacy (Patton, 2015). The researcher must achieve such knowledge by investing time with participants through interaction and collaboration (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through research, I attempted to answer, "What contributes to first-generation African American males' academic persistence enrolled at four-year primarily White institutions?" by investigating ten first-generation, African American males enrolled at a four-year university. The researcher collected data from multiple sources to determine conclusions that would add to the body of knowledge on the subject being studied.

Axiological Assumption

My axiological approach is that all research is valuable and incorporates the belief systems of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a first-generation, African American male student, I believe that similar students must have an academic support system that provides the proper resources and a sense of belonging to achieve academic persistence throughout their academic careers. Additionally, if institutions recruit and admit first-generation, African American male students, they should provide effective strategies that faculty and staff members

can employ to assist in academic persistence (Schwartz et al., 2018). Without the proper support systems and resources, first-generation, African American male students may not persist as their peers (Adams & McBrayer, 2020).

Researcher's Role

My role as the researcher was to create narratives without incorporating personal subjectivity (Moustakas, 1994). As a human instrument of the proposed study, I, the researcher, befittingly administered research that brought value to the research conducted. As the researcher, I facilitated communication between the participants of the study in qualitative research (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003). During the study, I built a positive rapport with the participants to ensure all were comfortable disclosing inner thoughts through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. As the researcher, I was obligated to set aside prejudgment of the phenomenon to answer the research questions (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). After the interviews and focus groups concluded, I pulled directly from participants' lived experiences and noted in a reflection journal biases that emerged (Patton, 2015).

As a higher education member and former member of the Trio Student Support Services community, I witnessed the struggles of first-generation, African American male students once they entered the university. As a university community member, I utilized my experiences from my undergraduate years as a student to provide insight to aid in student strategies to encourage persistence. This experience may yield some bias that I brought to this study, and as a result, I, therefore, disregarded personal experiences. The findings from the study provided information that can help produce effective strategies to increase first-generation, African American male students' academic persistence.

Procedures

The procedures section provides detailed descriptions of the steps utilized to conduct the stated study. The procedures used in this study to capture data were one-on-one interviews, surveys, and three focus groups. These data sources were selected because it allowed for engagement with the participants, learning about their perceptions and lived experiences. As the researcher for the study, one-on-one interviews allowed me to develop a rapport with the participants to develop a comfortable environment. Surveys were selected and provided the participants an opportunity to answer research questions confidentially. The surveys were conducted via Google Forms®, in which the participants completed the survey using multiple platforms, such as computers, tablets, or smart devices. The focus groups were selected to enable the participants to engage with one another, offering an opportunity to hear of other participants' lived experiences that may be like their own.

The QDAS software MAX QDA was utilized to analyze data from this research study. MAX QD is used in higher education to analyze and organize information from interviews, focus groups, and survey responses. The use of MAX QDA allowed the researcher to compare sections of information in an efficient manner (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Permissions

Before data collection can occur, I received approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A). The review board ensured that the study's design and procedures adhered to established guidelines required to ethically conduct research. The process for review began with formally submitting a proposal that provided extensive detail concerning the desired project. The proposal provided information on the selection of participants, data collection methods, sampling, and potential individuals who received a request

to participate in the desired study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participant recruitment and data collection did not take place until approval was received from Liberty University IRB and participant consent forms were signed.

Recruitment Plan

The recruitment of participants was an essential element of this research study. Participants were willing to divulge their perceptions and lived experiences as first-generation, African American male students enrolled in a primarily White institution. After the Liberty University IRB approved the study, participant recruitment began. Participant recruitment included six steps. First, I posted a recruitment flyer on specific first-generation, African American/Black male Facebook groups' pages (see Appendix B). The participants were no younger than 18 years of age. Second, I contacted each potential participant who responded to the recruitment flyer via email; I introduced myself as the researcher and discussed the study. Within the email, the purpose of the research study was highlighted to ensure the participants understood why they were asked to participate. Third, once the potential participants agreed to participate in the research study, 12 participants were selected using the sampling criteria.

Fourth, I emailed the participants the consent form, which provided relevant information required to agree to participate in the research study (see Appendix C). I provided them an option to ask questions via phone or email. Fifth, I documented and applied a unique alphanumeric code to the forms once consent forms were received and saved them in a password-protected, secure file to maximize confidentiality. Sixth, I sent a thank you response email to the participants with instructions attached concerning dates and times for semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and the email survey (see Appendix D).

Data Collection Plan

Phenomenological research provides the researcher an opportunity to explain the meaning of experiences (Chemero & Kaufer, 2015). Participants were invited to have in-depth discussions concerning their lived academic experiences as first-generation, African American males. Methods such as interviews, focus groups, and surveys, were utilized to capture the essence of the lived experiences and conversations to fully understand the experienced phenomena of a group of people (Van Manen, 2014). The participants were no younger than 18 years of age with the classification of second-semester freshman or higher, full-time enrolled at a four-year university, and they had to be pursuing a bachelor's degree. IRB approval was achieved prior to the collection process with research participants. Triangulation was utilized in this qualitative research by using multiple sources and theories to provide adequate information to support this study. I aligned with the Moustakas' (1994) modified data analysis process, using three data collection methods in this study. This study utilized one-on-one interviews, and I asked open-ended questions concerning students' academic experiences. I also conducted focus groups, offering students the opportunity to voice feedback concerning their educational journey, while encouraging the participants to discuss their lived experiences and attitudes regarding scripted questions and events (Vagle, 2018).

The student survey was brief, designed to increase understanding of the student and the barriers they encounter. Surveys were conducted via Google Forms®, allowing participants to complete the survey using multiple platforms, such as computers, tablets, or smart devices (i.e., phones). Data collection was essential and enabled me to develop and test emerging comprehension of the phenomena this study (Maxwell, 2018). According to Barbour (2018), to collect good data, it is essential to understand the purpose of the research.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the first method used to collect data. An interview is a conversation between two individuals in which one individual's aim is to lead the conversation to gain purposeful information (Guest et al., 2013). Qualitative interviews are guided conversations where the researcher learns about the participant (Holley & Harris, 2019). A qualitative interview aims to produce a robust description of the research problem to immerse data that communicates the participants' experiences (Manning & Stage, 2016). As stated by Morse et al. (2018), qualitative data are subjective and descriptive and often dissimilar, as one interview may include information or characterizations that the second may not. Interviews for this study were conducted in a one-on-one setting, allowing participants to engage the researcher and create a comfortable environment. The semi-structured interviews will include individuals who have experienced the phenomenon as noted by Creswell and Poth (2018). To adhere to Polkinghorne's (1987) recommendation of 5-25 selected participants who have experienced the phenomenon, 12 individuals who experienced the phenomenon were interviewed to satisfy Liberty University's requirement of at least 10 participants for researching a study. The participants were also asked broad and general questions during the one-on-one interviews as advised in the writings of Moustakas (1994).

Open-ended questions were raised concerning the students' lived academic experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Offering a one-on-one interview will also allow the participant to be fully transparent concerning their academic and social experiences while enrolled at a four-year institution and how those experiences affected their desire and ability to persist academically. The interview questions were designed to gain understanding concerning the students'

background, access and use of academic resources, challenges, university engagement, and

persistence. The duration of semi-structured interviews were 30-minutes to one hour.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about yourself and your understanding of a first-generation college student? CRQ

2. What inspired you to attend a Primarily White Institution PWI? SQ1

3. What challenges did you expect to encounter as a student before attending a primarily White institution? SQ1

4. How do you utilize support systems in the university? SQ1

5. What academic strategies have you identified and utilized this academic term to assist in your matriculation? SQ1

6. What spaces/places on campus do you find comfortable as a student at the university? SQ1

7. In what ways are you involved in a first-generation/Black, male support system at the university? SQ2

8. When were you made aware of campus resources? SQ2

9. What obstacles/challenges have you encountered being a first-generation, African American male on a primarily White institution (PWI) campus? SQ2

10. Have you ever needed mentorship? SQ2

11. When did you identify the need for mentorship as a first-generation, African American male student on campus? SQ2

12. Please characterize your encounters and relationships with your professors. SQ2

13. In what ways have you encountered racial bias while enrolled at the university? SQ3

14. Please characterize your encounters with your fellow students. SQ3

15. How often have you considered transferring or withdrawing from the institution? SQ3

16. What resources would assist you in your matriculation as a first-generation, African American male? SQ3

17. Do you have anything else you would like to add? SQ3

Question 1 was designed to establish a friendly dialog and break the ice between the researcher and the participants, inviting them to introduce themselves and describe their understanding of a first-generation student (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Questions two through five were designed to understand the participants' lived experiences, challenges, and academic strategies utilized by first-generation, African American male students during the academic semester to achieve academic success required to matriculate and persist (Harper, 2015). Question six was designed to understand what safe spaces were available to first-generation, African American male students on the campus of a PWI (Means & Pyne, 2017). Question seven is consequential as it provides relevant information regarding first-generation, African American male support on campus, which is necessary for academic persistence (Brooms, 2016). Question eight invited the participant to reflect on when they received information concerning campus resources to assist in achieving positive academic outcomes (Fries-Britt & White-Lewis, 2020).

Question nine was developed to invite participants to consider the obstacles and challenges that they faced as first-generation, African American male students enrolled at a PWI (Leath et al., 2019). Many higher education practitioners highlight that societal perceptions of African American male students often create barriers of discrimination that frequently contribute to the low academic engagement of African American male students enrolled in a PWI (Dixson & Gentzis, 2021). Question 10 allowed the participants to identify if they have ever received mentorship (Brooms, 2018a). Questions 11-12 allowed the participants to identify when they

realized the need for mentorship as a first-generation, African American male student. Sinanan's (2016) research identified that positive academic persistence for African American male students increased when African American faculty members mentored African American students. Question 13-14 encouraged the participant to reflect upon any racial bias encountered while enrolled at the university, including encounters with fellow students. Researchers Adams and McBrayer (2020) indicated that African Americans are at a greater risk of experiencing racial bias when attending a PWI. Cambell et al.'s (2019) findings also stated that 41% of African American college students experience disparaging racial comments during their academic career.

Question 15 presented the opportunity for participants to reflect upon their overall experience; based on the experience, they considered transferring or withdrawing from the institution. Research has indicated that African American male students do not often persist at PWI's due to racial discrimination (Brezinski et al., 2018). Question 16 presented the participants the opportunity to reflect and identify resources that would assist in their matriculation as first-generation, African American male students. Student matriculation and retention depend upon internal and external factors (Kahu & Lodge, 2018). The final question encouraged the participants to elaborate on their information throughout the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All questions for the semi-structured interviews were configured to align with Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological research methods.

Semi-Structured Interview Data Analysis Plan

Moustakas (1994) outlined the appropriate steps for phenomenological data analysis. Throughout this research study, all participants' transcripts received a comprehensive review according to the Van Kaam modified method of analysis. A phenomenological data analysis aligns to these seven steps: horizontalization, reduction and elimination, clustering and

thematizing, validation, individual textual description, individual structural description, and textural-structural description. Data management included listening to the recorded data twice and reading transcripts line-by-line twice to highlight any key ideas that stood out to ensure I comprehended what the participants communicated during the interview, reducing my bias. The first step in the modified Van Kaam data analysis method is horizontalization. Horizontalization requires initial coding and grouping of all communication relevant to the lived experience associated with the purpose and research questions and that all statements receive equal value. Reduction and elimination require the researcher to ascertain patterns to decide if verbal expressions supply adequate comprehension of the phenomenon and if the verbal expressions can be characterized as a lived experience perspective.

In the third step, clustering and thematizing, the connected components of the lived experiences are given related labels that come to be central themes of the lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). Application validation, the fourth step, requires a review of central themes against the entire transcript to verify that they are clearly expressed and compatible. Themes that are not relevant should be eradicated. The fifth step requires the construction of individual textual descriptions of experiences utilizing validated examples and themes from transcripts from the participants. The sixth step entails the development of structural descriptions based on preceding individual constructed descriptions and imaginative variation. The culminating step is to generate a textual-structural description of the meanings and essences of the participants' experiences incorporating invariant components and themes. Moustakas' modified Van Kaam method allowed me to capture the true ethos of the participants' lived experiences (Smith & Hope, 2020).

After the conclusion of the participant interviews, all interviews were coded by the researcher by hand coding and QDAS (participant/number, month, day, and year). Participant interviews were also video recorded using ZOOM, accompanied by the researchers' notes obtained from the interview to capture the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants concerning the phenomenon. Member checking occurred by each participant receiving a copy of their interview transcript to ensure their responses were accurately captured. Interviews were also transcribed, labeled, and saved using a generated code to identify the research participant. Information related to the interviews and participants were saved within a password-protected drive to ensure the safety and protection of the data collected. After data was collected, participants of the study had the option to examine the transcription to ensure statement authenticity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Focus Groups

The second method included three small focus groups comprised of four participants each, which allowed the participants to discuss their educational journey in an open setting with other first-generation, African American male students. Focus groups encouraged participants to express their feelings openly concerning their experiences. A significant element of focus groups is their ability to place the researcher in an atmosphere where face-to-face dialog can occur, creating valuable qualitative data from the participants (Tjora, 2018). The setting for focus groups allowed students to share and hear experiences from their peers, which further allowed them to share feedback concerning their educational journey, academic persistence, and challenges they may have faced.

During the focus groups, I had the opportunity to have ongoing exchanges with the participants to gain a variety of perspectives and experiences in an interactive manner (Morgan

& Hoffman, 2018). My desire was to provide careful and professional communication with the study participants to ensure a desirable atmosphere for the participants (Morgan & Hoffman, 2018). The engagement with focus groups was 30-minutes to one hour.

Focus Group Questions

1. What relationships on campus have encouraged or discouraged your academic persistence? CRQ

2. Describe how engaging in Black Male Initiatives encouraged you as a first-generation African American male student to persist academically. SQ1

3. As a first-generation, African American male student, how did adversity within the institution influence your engagement in Black Male Initiatives on campus? SQ1

4. What academic experiences encouraged you to create academic strategies to assist in your matriculation? SQ2

5. How has intrusive academic advising improved your academic performance and lived experiences as a first-generation, African American male student? SQ3

Questions one and two were designed to establish a friendly dialog and break the ice between the researcher and the participants. Inviting them to introduce themselves and describe how engaging in Black Male Initiatives may have improved their perceptions and lived experiences as first-generation, African American male students (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Question two also sought to understand how relationships with peers and faculty members encouraged or discouraged the participants' desire to persist as first-generation, African American male students. Literature indicated that positive interactions with faculty provide African American male students with an increased sense of belonging and the desire to excel academically (Havlik et al., 2020b). Question three encouraged participants to discuss how often

they participate in Black male initiatives on campus. Involvement in Black male initiatives provide first-generation, African American male students with necessary access to resources that can increase their sense of belonging and academic motivation (Brooms, 2016). Question four encouraged participants to reflect upon how they create academic strategies to achieve academic matriculation as first-generation, African American male students. Inadequate academic strategies significantly affect first-generation African American male students' ability to persist (Davidson et al., 2020). Question five encouraged participants to reflect upon how they create academic strategies to achieve academic matriculation as first-generation, African American male students. Inadequate academic strategies significantly affect first-generation, African American male students' ability to persist (Davidson et al., 2020).

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Focus group research is a traditional method of collecting qualitative data through interacting with a limited number of participants to understand their perceptions and lived experiences within a group setting (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Three, small focus groups comprised of four participants were selected from 12 research participants. Data analysis occurred by following seven steps: horizontalization, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing, validation, individual textual description, individual structural description, and textural-structural description (Moustakas, 1994). The first step in the modified Van Kaam data analysis method is horizontalization. Horizontalization requires initial coding and grouping of all communication relevant to the lived experience with all statements receiving equal value. Reduction and elimination require the researcher to ascertain patterns to decide if verbal expressions supply adequate comprehension of the phenomenon and if the verbal expressions can be characterized as a lived experience perspective.

In the third step, clustering and thematizing, the connected components of the lived experiences are given related labels that come to be central themes of the lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). Application validation, the fourth step, requires a review of central themes against the entire transcript to verify that they are clearly expressed and compatible. Themes that are not relevant should be eradicated. The fifth step requires the construction of individual textural descriptions of experiences, utilizing validated examples and themes from transcripts from the participants. The sixth step entails the development of structural descriptions based on preceding individual constructed descriptions and imaginative variation. The culminating step is to generate a textual-structural description of the meanings and essences of the participants' experiences, incorporating invariant components and themes. Moustakas' modified Van Kaam method allowed me to capture the true ethos of the participants' lived experiences (Smith & Hope, 2020).

After the conclusion of the focus groups, all interviews were coded by the researcher using hand coding and QDAS (participant/number, month, day, and year). Focus group interviews were recorded using ZOOM, accompanied by the researcher's notes obtained from the interview to capture the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants concerning the phenomenon. Member checking occurred by each participant receiving a copy of their transcript to ensure their responses were accurately captured. Focus group interviews were also transcribed, labeled, and saved using a generated code to identify the research participant.

Information related to the focus group interviews and participants was saved within a password-protected drive to ensure the safety and protection of the data collected. Focus group interviews were transcribed utilizing Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam method of analyzing phenomenological data. Reviewing of the data included listening to the recorded data

twice and reading transcripts twice line-by-line to highlight any key ideas that stood out to ensure validity and fully comprehend what the participants communicated during the interview, reducing my bias. After data was collected, participants of the study had the option to examine the transcription to ensure statement authenticity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Surveys

The third data collection method utilized was surveys. The use of surveys allowed participants the opportunity to fully express themselves via a web-based survey administered through Google Forms®. The survey was brief, designed to understand the students and the barriers they encounter. Participants completed the survey using multiple platforms such as computers, tablets, or smart devices (i.e., phones). The web-based survey was private to eliminate the fear that can hinder truthful answers to the questions presented.

Utilizing survey questions allowed the researcher to formulate questions that focused on the participants' experiences to obtain valuable data (Moustakas,1994). Survey questions also assisted the researcher in understanding relevant information regarding influences and university services that were utilized by first-generation, African American males that possibly affected academic persistence.

Survey Questions

1. What do you believe contributes to first-generation, African American males' academic persistence enrolled at four-year primarily White institutions? CRQ

2. Describe how your experience in the Black Male Initiative influenced your involvement with academic advising throughout the academic year? SQ1

3. As a first-generation, African American male student, describe some of the challenges you encountered within your institution. SQ2

4. How did your involvement with academic advising throughout the academic year influence your academic persistence? SQ3

The survey questions were generated to gain a deeper understanding of the participants of this research study. The created questions allowed the researcher to learn if the participants utilized university academic resources, encountered barriers as first-generation, African American male students, and what support they received while enrolled in a primarily White institution. Question one sought to learn about the student's belief of what contributed to their academic persistence while enrolled in a PWI. Literature indicates that PWIs lack supportive services for African American male students (Lucas, 2018). Question two encouraged students to express if Black Male Initiatives influenced them to utilize academic advising to improve their lived experience and academic persistence throughout the academic year. Academic professionals suggest that academic advising provides opportunities to create educational plans, identify early warning signs to assist first-generation, African American male persistence, and improve lived experiences (Johnson et al., 2019).

Question 3 allowed the participants to reveal if they encountered barriers that negatively affected their perceptions and lived experiences when enrolled in the institution due to being a first-generation African American male student (Davidson et al., 2020; Leath et al., 2019). Question 4 allowed the participants to discuss academic advising involvement during the academic year. The literature indicated that African American male students often lack sufficient academic preparation before enrolling in an institution of higher learning (Wallace & Gagen, 2020).

Survey Data Analysis Plan

Survey questions are open-ended questions aimed to divulge the lived experiences and perceptions of the research participants. Open-ended questions in qualitative research provide a thorough understanding of participants lived experiences and perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The survey was conducted utilizing Google Forms®, an online survey platform. I began analysis by following seven steps: horizontalization, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing, validation, individual textual description, individual structural description, and textual-structural description. The first step in the modified Van Kaam data analysis method is horizontalization. Horizontalization requires initial coding and grouping of all communication relevant to the lived experience and that all statements receive equal value (Moustakas, 1994). Reduction and elimination require the researcher to ascertain patterns to decide if verbal expressions supply adequate comprehension of the phenomenon and if the verbal expressions can be characterized as a lived experience perspective (Moustakas, 1994).

In the third step, clustering and thematizing, the connected components of the lived experiences are given related labels that come to be central themes of the lived experience. Application validation, the fourth step, requires a review of central themes against the entire transcript to verify that they are clearly expressed and compatible. Themes that are not relevant should be eradicated (Moustakas, 1994). The fifth step requires the construction of individual textual descriptions of experiences utilizing validated examples and themes from transcripts from the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The sixth step entails the development of structural descriptions based on preceding individual constructed descriptions and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). The culminating step is to generate a textual-structural description of the meanings and essences of the participants' experiences incorporating invariant components and

themes (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas' modified Van Kaam method allowed me to capture the true ethos of the participants' lived experiences (Smith & Hope, 2020).

After the conclusion of the survey, all survey responses were coded by the researcher by hand coding and QDAS (participant/number, month, day, and year). Member checking occurred as each participant received a copy of their interview transcript to ensure their responses were accurately captured. Surveys were also labeled and saved using a generated code to identify the research participant.

Data Synthesis

The textural description is created from themes and established horizons of participants' lived experiences. The textural description portrays the participants' perceptions of a phenomenon while strictly employing exact words and phrases from the participants' interviews. Using the participant's own words provided a clear and unique view of the participant's perception of the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1994). In a transcendental, phenomenological study, the textural descriptions provide the essential "what" of the participant's experience. *Individual structural descriptions* are defined by Moustakas (1994) as the process of unveiling a participant's shrouded explanation and powerful experiences. The textural-structural description depicted the significance of the participant's lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Textural and structural descriptions were combined to create an expansive description and a thorough understanding of the perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest. When texture and structure are joined together, they provide the pretense of the unseen collaborating to generate a clear understanding of the experience

(Moustakas, 1994). Individual textural descriptions were formed from the themes and horizons that emerged from the research study participants. Imaginative variations were applied to unveil the participants' lived experiences and to substantiate the identification of meanings. Individual structural descriptions provided the unseen meanings of all participant's individual experiences.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a method utilized to measure the confidence of the researcher's work (Durdella, 2019). This research study must not misrepresent the data to support the researcher's interest or biases. To establish trustworthiness, I utilized triangulation, reflexivity, and member checking. Utilizing triangulation, I used multiple sources and theories to provide adequate information to support the study. In this researcher, I identified and listed code categories for themes while comparing data forms (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Credibility

Credibility provided confidence in the truth of this study's findings. Credibility was achieved by researching in an ethical manner that accurately described reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation, member checking, and direct quotes were the techniques utilized to establish credibility. Through member checking, the researcher gained feedback from participants concerning their views of the research findings by sending a verbatim transcript to participants to verify responses for accuracy to align with Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam data analysis method. The researcher also used the participants' responses to validate the research. Data were analyzed by hand, accompanied by MAX QDA, a qualitative data analysis software used for coding (Patton, 2015). The researcher analyzed data several times to ensure accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability is the ability to utilize the findings from this qualitative study and apply them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability provides the reader with adequate information to establish a study's interchangeability and findings (Patton, 2015). The findings of a study are required to be valid and capture the attention of others, providing a foundation of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Providing a thorough description is an ideal strategy to confirm transferability in qualitative research (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I used a well-developed description of this study, which provided valuable results that can be utilized in similar higher education populations.

Dependability

Dependability is the consistency and reliability of research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve dependability, each interview was transcribed when it was concluded. Proper recording software was utilized to ensure that participants' responses were captured accurately. Temi transcribing software also ensured dependability, consistency, triangulation, and reflexivity (Shelton & Flint, 2019). I increased dependability by utilizing an inquiry audit by a qualified external researcher, who was permitted to review the design and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The utilization and purpose of an external audit is to review validity and examine findings to ensure interpretations and conclusions are supported by the collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability

Confirmability is a degree of neutrality to which the findings of the research study are shaped by the participants' responses and not by the researcher's motivation bias or personal interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Techniques utilized for establishing confirmability in this

research study included: (a) confirmability audits, (b) audit trails, (c) triangulation, and (d) reflexivity. An *audit trail* is a qualitative strategy that a researcher uses to establish confirmability. Audit trails are an in-depth approach that proves that the research findings are based on the participants' responses (Patton, 2015). Audit trails require a description of how data was collected and analyzed in an unconcealed manner. I utilized audit trails by taking detailed notes concerning the decisions made throughout the research process. Triangulation is defined as the use of multiple methods in qualitative research used to develop a thorough understanding of the phenomena (Patton, 1999). I utilized multiple sources and theories to provide adequate information to support the study. Triangulation of data sources strengthens the accuracy and credibility of research findings (Patton, 2015). Triangulation was accomplished by collecting data from personal interviews, focus groups, and surveys to develop a comprehensive understanding of participants' lived experiences.

Reflexivity is a valuable technique in qualitative research that a researcher utilizes when collecting data. The researcher will have the opportunity to explain the interpretation of the information in the study. Reflexivity provides the researcher the opportunity to place themselves in the research (Patton, 2015). The researcher will also seek feedback from participants concerning their views of the research findings. The researcher will use the participants to validate the research.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical research is constructed to provide community change (Mertens, 2018). For a study to be functional, readers and potential users must have faith in the study's integrity (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Researchers must conduct themselves in an ethical manner (Hays & Singh, 2011). Participants' identities were not disclosed throughout this transcendental,

phenomenological study to ensure protection from harm. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study before the initial interview. All questions were open-ended to avoid sharing the researcher's perceptions and to gain an accurate understanding of the participants' perceptions and lived experiences. As the researcher, it was my responsibility to ensure safety by providing accurate information to the participants, ensuring the understanding of participation for this study is voluntary.

Information concerning the participants of this study was stored on a password-protected hard drive and stored in a secure location for four years. The actual names of the participants were replaced with pseudonyms to protect their identity. All files concerning participants will be deleted after four years (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Jackson (2018), ethical codes require that the researcher provide all participants with confidentiality rights. I utilized self-reflection to avoid ethics breaches, as Tiidenberg (2018) outlined. I adhered to the ethical guidelines and principles that bind all researchers to high ethical practice standards (Lapan et al., 2011).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to justify the selected qualitative research method. Qualitative research encompasses an interpretive and realistic approach to the world (Harwell, 2011). The selected transcendental phenomenological qualitative research approach examined the experiences amongst first-generation, African American male students by utilizing several methods to gain understanding. The methods utilized were one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and surveys to collect the necessary data to understand the lived experiences and challenges of first-generation, African American male students that endeavor to persist. Descriptions

concerning participants, settings, data collection, procedures, and the researcher's role concerning this study were also discussed.

Qualitative research explores change over time by asking participants to verbalize their experiences (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). Daniel and Harland (2018) stated that phenomenology involves analysis and understanding of the structures of experiential consciousness as experienced activities and phenomena. An appropriate selection of a research design justified the research conducted by the researcher to resolve the identified problem (Vogt et al., 2012). This transcendental phenomenological qualitative research aimed to assist in establishing strategies to increase the academic persistence of first-generation, African American male students in higher education with the appropriate qualitative research methods. Advancing African American male college persistence will require practical strategies and policies that appeal to African American male students' unique needs and experiences enrolled at four-year institutions (Harper & Wood, 2016). The readers of this study will be able to understand the research questions and research design as suggested by Delamont (2016).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This transcendental, phenomenological study aimed to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest. The research study's goal was to capture the essence of the lived experiences and conversations to fully understand the experience phenomena of a group of people (Van Manen, 2014). This chapter will present the research findings and data analysis connected to the participants' lived experiences in this study. The following section of this chapter delineates the 12 participants' perceived lived experiences and personal encounters with the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). The third section of this chapter presents the results from data analysis from the three data collection methods utilized: semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys to align with Moustakas' (1994) modified data analysis process.

A transcendental phenomenology design was used to protect participants from harm and reduce personal bias from data collected and analyzed within this study (Moustakas, 1994). The transcendental, phenomenological approach permitted the researcher to use several methods to develop and obtain an understanding of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The emerged findings and themes were obtained from transcribed, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys of the participants' lived experiences in a four-year, primarily white institution. The chapter will conclude by examining the themes that emerged from the data collected in this research study.

Participants

The research study consisted of 12 self-identified, first-generation, African American male students ranging from second-semester freshmen to senior academic classifications who attended a four-year, primarily White institution in the Midwest. A purposive, homogeneous sampling strategy was used to select the 12 participants. All potential participants reported that neither parent attended nor graduated from a four-year institution of higher learning, aligning with the listed definition for first-generation students used in this research study (Hines et al., 2020b). The potential participants met the age requirements of 18-22 years of age and the academic classification qualification of being a full-time, second-semester freshmen through senior student pursuing a bachelor's degree. The 12 participants in this research study received pseudonyms (Derrick, Hakeem, Deshawn, Jeremy, Dave, Javon, Chris, Kevin, Travis, Xavier, Lamonte, and Zander) to protect their identities. The names selected align with the culture of the participants and research criteria for selecting first-generation, African American male college students.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Student Age	Student Classification	Interview	Focus Group	Survey
1. Derrick	19	Sophomore	X	X	X
2. Hakeem	18	Second-semester freshman	X	X	X
3. Deshawn	22	Senior	X	X	X
4. Jeremy	20	Junior	X	X	X
5. Dave	22	Senior	X	X	X
6. Javon	19	Sophomore	X	X	X
7. Chris	20	Junior	X	X	X
8. Kevin	19	Sophomore	X	X	X
9. Travis	19	Second Semester Freshman	X	X	X
10. Xavier	21	Senior	X	X	X
11. Lamonte	21	Junior	X	X	X
12. Zander	20	Sophomore	X	X	X

Data collection procedures began with posting the recruitment flyer (see Appendix B) in the Facebook group, *Empowering African American First Gen.* Due to the group's activity, I received interest from 16 students within five days of posting. Second, I contacted each potential participant who responded to the recruitment flyer via email, introducing myself as the researcher and discussing the study. Within the emails, the purpose of the research study was highlighted to ensure the participants understood why they were being asked to participate. Third, 12 participants were selected using the sampling criteria.

Fourth, I emailed the participants the consent form, which provided relevant information required to agree to participate in the research study (see Appendix C). I also provided them an option to ask questions via phone or email. Fifth, I documented and applied a unique,

alphanumeric code to the forms once consent forms were received, and then I saved them in a password-protected, secure file to maximize confidentiality. Sixth, I sent a thank you response email to the participants with instructions attached concerning dates and times for semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and the email survey (see Appendix D).

Derrick

Derrick was a 19-year-old, first-generation, African American sophomore majoring in pre-med studies. He was involved in several clubs at the institution. Derrick was a member of several organizations at his university, including Doctors of Tomorrow and the chess club. Derrick served as the treasurer and coordinator for the chess club. Derrick plans on attending medical school after graduation.

Hakeem

Hakeem was an 18-year-old, first-generation, African American second-semester freshman majoring in criminal justice. Hakeem lived on campus and worked a campus job to assist in paying for his tuition. Hakeem's desired to enter law school and become a criminal defense attorney. Hakeem was the youngest of his brothers, and he feels he must graduate from college to financially help his family. Hakeem was an active member of the Pre-Law Scholars club and Brother Building Brothers club.

Deshawn

Deshawn was a 22-year-old, first-generation, African American, senior male student who majored in engineering. Deshawn has accepted a job opportunity from his current co-op assignment. Deshawn's goal was to teach engineering at the university level once he receives additional experience in the field. Deshawn was active in community-based organizations and desired to be more involved once he graduated from college.

Jeremy

Jeremy was a 20-year-old, first-generation, African American, male junior student majoring in psychology. Jeremy was a member of the football team with dreams of becoming a professional football player. If he cannot achieve his dream, Jeremy desires to become a sports psychologist and work with professional athletes. Jeremy was also involved in the university's jazz music club where he was a saxophone player.

Dave

Dave was a 21-year-old, first-generation, African American, male senior majoring in education. Dave desired to help others by becoming an educator after attending graduate school. Dave was active in the university's soccer club and volunteered his time at his former high school as an assistant soccer coach. Dave hopes to be accepted into a graduate program that will fully equip him to become an impactful educator.

Javon

Javon was a 19-year-old, African American, sophomore, male student criminal justice major. Javon hopes to become a federal police officer or a lawyer after graduating college. Javon was an active member of the NAACP chapter at the university and served as the chapter's secretary. Javon hopes to use his platform in his school's NAACP chapter to bring awareness of social justice issues in his community and campus.

Chris

Chris was a 20-year-old, African American, male, junior majoring in business. Chris received a full academic scholarship from his institution. Chris desires to become a member of a Fortune 500 company and eventually start his own company. Chris was involved in several organizations promoting black excellence and campus accountability.

Kevin

Kevin was a 19-year-old, African American, male, sophomore majoring in finance. Kevin was a member of the future leaders of tomorrow and hopes to use the experience to prepare him to achieve his dream of working in a top-rated investment firm. Kevin was also a member of Brother Building Brothers, a black male support group that is active on campus and in the community.

Travis

Travis was a 19-year-old, African American, second-semester freshman student majoring in pre-dental studies. Travis grew up in a two-parent home where his father and mother both graduated high school and decided to enter the workforce full-time. Travis acknowledged that he wanted to attend college to assist him in achieving his goal of becoming a dentist. Travis also stated that his desire to become a dentist stemmed from conversations with his grandmother and grandfather.

Xavier

Xavier was a 21-year-old, African American, male, senior student majoring in architecture. Xavier's desire to become an architect stemmed from his fascination with building blocks as a young kid. His mother enrolled him in a mentorship program that exposed students to different careers at an early age. His early conversations and exposure to architects allowed him to learn about building design. Xavier plans to become an architect once he graduates from college.

Lamonte

Lamonte was a 21-year-old, African American, male, junior majoring in finance. He was a two-sport athlete in high school but transitioned to a one-sport athlete once he enrolled in

college. Lamonte is a member of the basketball team and dreams of becoming a professional athlete. Lamonte desires to use his finance degree and become a sports agent if he cannot become a professional athlete.

Zander

Zander was a 20-year-old African American male sophomore majoring in engineering. Zander desires to become an electrical engineer, hoping to join his father in the family business. Zander was active in the campus engineering club and Black Male Support Center. Zander was hopeful that his campus engagement would invoke positive change on campus.

Results

This transcendental, phenomenological study aimed to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest. I began collecting data by conducting semi-structured interviews using Zoom with the 12 participants. There were 17 open-ended questions that all participants were asked to answer. The quotations in this section are the participants' words, including speech errors, to present the participants' words accurately. The focus group interview session was conducted using Zoom. All the participants participated in three small groups comprised of four participants. To achieve a full understanding, five questions were asked. This study also utilized surveys to allow participants to fully express themselves via a web-based survey administered through Google Forms®. The survey was brief and designed to understand the students and the barriers they encountered.

Theme Development

To fully narrate the phenomenon of the persistence of first-generation, African American male students enrolled at a four-year, primarily White institution, all 12 participants who met the

study requirements for this study participated. The 12 participants engaged in semi-structured interviews, 12 participated in focus groups, and 12 participated in the survey questions. Participants provided answers that were open and straightforward concerning their lived experiences. The 12 participants clearly recalled situations they encountered and persevered through in their academic years.

Four main themes emerged from the data analysis of this study. Participants shared their encounters with themes during semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys. The participants openly shared their experiences in detail, ranging from freshmen year to their senior year. The participants discussed academic challenges, preparation, mentorship, and family expectations and relationships. In the following sections, codes and themes are discussed.

Table 2

Themes and Codes

Theme	Codes
1. Belongingness and Family Expectations.	Discomfort Pressure
2. Academic Preparation and Resources	Anxiety Detached
3. Mentorship	Support System Connection Example
4. Family and Campus Relationships	First-Generation Achievement

Theme 1: Belongingness and Family Expectations

A welcoming and supportive campus is essential to creating a climate where students feel they belong and are wanted (Havlik et al., 2020b). Research has acknowledged that academic persistence increases when a sense of belonging is present. This theme aligns with the central research question: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of first generation, African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest? The below quotations of six of the twelve participants of this study varied, including deficient levels of sense of belonging that produced the desire to give up at times or consider transferring institutions, specifically to attend historically Black colleges and universities or other minority-serving institutions. Hakeem, one of the participants and a second-semester freshman, stated:

> I was excited to be a college student when I first arrived at the university. That excitement began to vanish as I attended classes and realized I was often the only African American in my class, creating a strange feeling as if my professor and peers were watching me. I felt that I did not belong; some made it clear by their actions and words. When I would sit next to classmates, they would offer a strange look, often moving to another open seat or even offering a strange look.

Another participant, Jeremy, a junior, indicated similar sentiments to Hakeem's lack of belonging on campus and in the classroom. Jeremy stated:

> My college experience has been the total opposite of what I expected. I stand out everywhere I go on campus, especially in my classes. Classmates look at me as if I am not supposed to be here. It was very uncomfortable for me. I have often considered

transferring to colleges. I thought about transferring, but my family is here, and I don't

want to leave or disappoint them.

Dave, a senior who is a full academic scholarship recipient, stated:

I am here because I received a full academic scholarship. I thought I would have a

different college experience. My time here has created some stressful moments, I have

had moments where I want to drop out and do somethings else. I'm just going to ride it

out since it's my last semester. It feels like a roller-coaster at times. It's not always bad,

but when it is bad it is bad.

Another participant, a 19-year-old sophomore, acknowledged the lack of belonging on

campus and how his peers perceive him at times. Kevin reflected that the perception and the

treatment he received as an African American, first-generation student caused him to withdraw

socially and academically:

One of my first encounters on campus, I went to the café and one of the workers

automatically assumed I was on touring the campus and not a student. I feel it gets hard

to ignore some of the blatant ignorance I witness daily. It's a strange feeling, to be on

campus and people automatically assume you're not supposed to be there. Even while

taking exams, the graduate assistant would pay more attention to me as if I were cheating

compared to the attention given to my peers. I'm getting better with adjusting, but I

shouldn't have to deal with the constant stereotypes.

Zander, a 20-year-old sophomore, acknowledged that he thought attending college would

be like his high school experience, where his peers did not focus on race and where he may have

come from. Zander stated:

It's crazy that people treat you differently as an African American on campus. Being the first in my family to attend college, figuring this environment out has been a challenge. I have attended our Black male group on campus, which is a help, but once I leave the group events, it feels like I have to face these awkward situations alone while in class and other areas on campus.

Another participant, Lemonte, a 21-year-old student-athlete, reflected and acknowledged the lack of the sense of belonging he has experienced on campus as a first-generation, African American male student who is also an athlete. Lemonte stated:

When I enter campus buildings with security stations at the entrance, they are quick to stop me and if I have a student id while my white peers walk right by with no problem. I have to remind them I'm on the basketball team that works on some occasions. I have had my bag searched and even was forced to miss a class because I left my ID at my parent's house one weekend, and I was taken to the campus police station because they said I fit the profile of someone on film breaking into cars on campus. After a review of the film, it clearly showed he had short hair and was twice my size in weight.

All the participants felt a lack of sense of belonging and detached. They expressed not receiving the same treatment as their peers of other races. The participants also felt disadvantaged at times due to being first-generation, African American males, holding feelings of anxiety as they walked the grounds of the campus, reluctant to ask for help due to expected negative responses.

Theme 2: Academic Preparation and Resources

Literature suggests that first-generation, African American males are less academically prepared, which can hinder academic persistence (Pratt et al., 2019). The lack of academic

preparation and understanding of campus resources can result in additional academic stress and dismissal from an institution (Sinanan, 2016). This theme aligns with Sub-question Two: How do first-generation, African American male students describe their academic preparedness when enrolling in a primarily White institution? First-generation, African American male students may also receive less parental encouragement and support, which is necessary to create successful strategies to graduate from an institution of higher learning (Hines et al., 2020a). One of the participants stated that one of the challenges he faced was a partial understanding of the academic resources available to him when he started as a student. During his interview, Hakeem stated:

> I felt so lost when I got here. I had no clue what I was up against or what to do. I didn't know the resources I had as a student. My parents did not fully understand it either. My family and I did not know tutoring existed in college and that it was free.

Another participant described his lack of academic awareness as an adjustment to college life, and what was required for him to attain good grades. Deshawn stated:

> When I first arrived at college, I thought it would be like high school. I did not know that I would have to work 10 times more than I did in high school and that my professors would not check to see if I completed my work on time as my high school teachers did. Even with working harder, I felt like I was slipping behind and was referred to academic support by my professor. Now that I know the academic support office and resources, I often use them throughout the semester.

Travis acknowledged that one of his challenges as a second-semester freshman was figuring out how to be a successful student and learning the resources needed to become a successful student. Travis stated:

My first semester here was a total cultural shock. It was challenging learning how to ask

for help. I didn't want people to think I was dumb. I didn't know I could not just walk

into tutoring sessions, I had to make appointments, unlike in high school. Man, I had to

learn how to get the help and tutoring I needed. Because I didn't want my family to know

my grades were trash. Another participant explained that he learned about campus

academic resources due to poor performance in class and feeling unprepared.

Jeremy stated:

I was behind other students in classes because I was unfamiliar with the content. When

classes started, the professor told us this would be a review of the information we already

knew. I felt extremely lost in class and often embarrassed when asked a question I had no

clue how to answer. I was belittled by my professor and he that I receive tutoring and join

a study group. Even after his recommendation I hesitated to attend classes and tutoring

sessions.

The participants of the study carried feelings of stress and disappointment when they

realized they were not as academically prepared as their peers in other ethnic groups once they

encountered the college lecture hall. Research has indicated that African American male students

are enrolling into institutions of higher learning less prepared for college-level work than their

peers of other races (Atuahene, 2021). Such feelings of embarrassment and stress can greatly

affect a student's ability and desire to academically persist.

Derrick also explained how he felt unprepared for the work in college and how he learned

about campus resources. Derrick stated:

It has been challenging adjusting here as a student. In high school, the work came easy.

My first semester was very challenging, and it was a big difference in the level of work I

had to do. The content was foreign to me and so was the volume of work received. After

receiving a bad grade on my first two quizzes, I contacted my academic advisor and was

told to attend office hours and sign up for tutoring.

Another participant described his experience of how he was made aware of campus resources.

Kevin stated:

I learned about campus resources after receiving several terrible grades in a few of my

classes. I felt confident that I was ready for this level of work, but those first couple of

tests showed I needed to prepare more. My professor and my mentor told me to seek

additional help and use the campus resources for me as a student. That is when I learned

about study groups and tutoring sessions.

During the focus group session, many of the participants acknowledged that one of the

challenges they faced was understanding how to ask for help in a space they felt uncomfortable.

Deshawn expressed: "My first couple semesters at school, after a few uncomfortable encounters

with a professor, it was hard to ask for help because I assumed the outcome would be the same as

it was with my professor." Zander added that a challenge he faced was learning how to deal with

the constant stereotypes: "It's weird to say and think, but I had to change the way I dressed on

campus especially, at night. I couldn't walk around with a hoodie on; being Black it drew the

wrong attention." The challenges that the participants divulged during the focus groups

highlighted some of the barriers first-generation, African American males encounter while

enrolled at a primarily White institution.

Participants indicated in their survey responses that involvement in academic advising

throughout the academic year was helpful when they attended. One participant divulged, "My

advisor saved me. I was trying to attempt 20 credits to graduate early, and based on the classes I

had lined up the outcome would've been all bad." Another participant indicated that attending advising has helped him improve his GPA by learning to take the right class and professor combinations. The participants confirmed what researchers indicated concerning the importance of creating holistic academic plans and how they equip African American male students with the required tools and support needed to succeed academically (Fernandez et al., 2017).

Theme 3: Mentorship

First-generation, African American male students encounter countless academic and social barriers as they navigate their higher education journey (Dixson & Gentzis, 2021). Research concerning African American male students has indicated that when African American male students engage in mentorship, positive academic persistence often occurs (Sinanan, 2016). The participants in this study indicated that they found mentors through the Black Male initiative on campus. Mentorship can provide first-generation, African American male students with a support system and an encouraging voice, which can increase their sense of belonging and academic persistence (Havlik et al., 2020b).

The review of the literature suggested that highly influential practices, such as Black Male Initiatives, directly influence first-generation, African American male students' desire to persist academically (Sinanan, 2016). This theme aligns with Sub-question One: What role did participation in Black Male Initiatives play in first-generation African American male academic persistence in a PWI? All the participants in this research study acknowledged the importance of mentorship and how it helped them throughout their academic semesters. They were introduced to the idea of mentorship when they attended and joined the Black Male support group on campus. One of the participants highlighted that the mentorship he has received had taught him how to navigate the institution and the importance of having goals. Javon stated:

Having a mentor keeps me grounded and accountable to someone outside of my family. Having someone who has accomplished what I am working towards has been helpful. My mentor has also helped me to become a stronger student by having weekly and often daily conversations to help me stay focused and do my part. I feel I'm like connected to someone who cares about me.

Another participant stated that having someone he can talk to who looks like him has made things easier for him. Lemonte stated:

Having a mentor who is an African American and who was the first in his family to do something different has been very helpful. He has made me feel comfortable and eased my transition into the university by sharing his experiences and how he dealt with similar situations, I face daily. He often reminds me that he also faces similar situations as a professional on campus. His mentorship pushes me to keep going, not just for myself but for my family.

Xavier described how mentorship helped him beyond academics. Xavier stated:

I met my mentor during a very challenging time in my life as a student. When I met him, I was lost academically and in my life after my grandma died. Our constant conversations helped me realize that God has a plan for my life. Meeting him changed my life and helped me understand the potential that I have inside. I work even harder in class because he is cheering me on, and I do not want to disappoint him.

Another participant described mentorship as a father figure and brother on campus. Chris stated:

Listen if I ever need to laugh, he is my first stop on campus. He's extremely cool and real. The mentorship that I have received has kept me in school. I often wanted to quit and go home, but those phone calls and conversations in his office has helped me keep

things together. The conversations keep me out of trouble and have taught me how to

deal with situations I face in life. If I wanted to give up, he would not let me, and I am

grateful for that.

Dave, a senior, stated:

If it had not been for mentorship, I would have left the university long ago. My

relationship with my mentor and I has kept me at the university. The open-door policy

and the freedom to call him whenever I need to talk or need anything has helped in many

ways that are hard to explain. My mentor has been someone I can confide in, and the

advice I have received throughout my time here has provided me with countless

opportunities outside the institution for my major.

Another participant noted that having a mentor has helped him understand how valuable an

education is. Travis stated:

Conversations with my mentor helped me understand the value of the opportunity to earn

a college degree. I can't be out here in life foolish. Having someone encouraging and

believing in me keeps me working to improve. It also helps to have someone who will

look out for you and keep you headed in the right direction.

In the focus group sessions, many of the participants acknowledged that adversity faced

in the classroom and with peers on campus influenced them to engage in Black Male initiatives

offered on campus. Kevin explained that some of the strange and negative experiences led him to

seek interaction with his Black peers on campus. He said, "There isn't many of us on campus, so

we tend to hang together in campus area where the Black male group and mentors' offices are

located it's a space to escape and chill." Javon stated:

The NAACP office is located in the same building as the mentors' offices so by default it's my go to space to hang when I'm from some of the stuff I deal with on campus. It's a stress-free zone where I can chill with my brothers who are like minded and want and need inspiration to keep going.

In the survey questions, several participants mentioned that leaders of the Black male initiatives would strongly encourage them to participate in academic advising as several of the staff members were academic advisors. One participant stated, "I lucked up having my advisor being my mentor. I get the best of both worlds the real-life advice and academic advice." Another participant stated that his Black male group requires them to participate in academic advising if they want to fully participate in the group. The meaningful bond that is formed between mentors and the first-generation, African American male students encouraged them to seek out useful academic resources that provided the participants basic needs required to persist.

Theme 4: Family and Campus Relationships

Influential relationships with family members provide first-generation, African American male students the desire to persist academically when attending institutions of higher learning (Hines et al., 2020b). Research indicated that support family provides first-generation college students the confidence needed when embarking on a foreign educational journey. More importantly, campus relationships are a key contributor to student persistence (Brooms, 2018b). Having proactive academic relationships with faculty and staff members often provide students with a family atmosphere that encourages them to persist academically (Huerta et al., 2018). This theme aligns with Sub-question Three: How does intrusive academic advising affect perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students? Dave stated:

One of the biggest things I had to learn was how to establish relationships with people outside my family in a new environment. It's a challenge to trust people you don't really know. I started to learn the importance of that once I started meeting with my academic advisor. In the beginning, all the questions about family, life, and academics felt strange. But I learned relationships are important if I want to achieve in school and in life.

Derrick stated:

It's always been the three of us in my family. One of the first people I met on campus was my academic advisor for registration. He kept it real with me, telling me what I needed to do as an example to the ones coming after me in my family. He doesn't play any games when it comes to my grades, either. Our relationship has helped me a lot. There are many times I come and just sit in the office and talk.

Another participant, Javon, stated:

The relationships that I have with some of my peers started with my advisor introducing us to each other. Telling us to look out for one another; since then, I try to check in with her weekly. Being around someone who would put me in check as my mom does helps me listen to the academic advice provided saved me a few times.

The participants believed that relationships that closely resembled their family relationships were beneficial to their academic and social life. The supportive relationships are what they believed allowed them to open up, teaching them how to adjust to new cultures and environments. Xavier admitted, "During the week I see my peers and mentors than I do my own family. So naturally I began to open up, embrace those who showed love, and treat them like family whether it's a peer, staff member, or a professor."

Many of the participants divulged in the survey questions that key campus and family relationships contributed to their academic persistence at their institutions. One participant stated that "hearing my mom say that she is praying for me every day helps me to keep going. I know those prayers are working because I'm still here." Another participant mentioned, "Having people on campus that I can vent to has helped me keep my sanity. There are some things I don't want to disclose to family. I don't want them to lose hope in me being able to finish what I started. Having those go to people on campus has helped me in so many ways." Key relationships on campus and with family helped sustain many of the participants and encouraged them, providing them with what they needed to academically persist.

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Research Question Responses

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The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest. Three data collection methods, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys, were used to describe the participants' lived experiences associated with the research questions. The findings and explanations of these questions are presented below.

Central Research Question

The Central Research Question asked, "What are the perceptions and lived experiences of first generation African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest?" Persistence, for this study, was defined as continued enrollment (or degree completion) at any higher education institution, including one different from the institution of initial enrollment in the fall (Zemack-Rugar et al., 2021). The 12 participants of this research study met the selection criteria as males enrolled in a PWI in the

Midwest United States who graduated from a metropolitan public school system, identified as African American, were first-generation males whose ages range from 18-22, and were considered one of the following academic classifications: second-semester first-year student, sophomore, junior, or senior OR must have graduated from a PWI and be enrolled in various academic studies within the last five years. The distinctive attributes of the 12 participants contribute to the written work on the academic persistence of first-generation, African American male students enrolled at a four-year, primarily White institution.

The findings of this study divulge that first-generation, African American male college students endured and persisted by learning and understanding how to use available academic and social resources. Despite participants not using the term *persistence* in this research study, they clearly described persistence as this essential notion in their lived experiences that encouraged decision-making processes and motivation regarding their academic lives. Chris revealed, "When I announced to my family, I was attending college on a full academic scholarship they broke down in tears joy that a new tradition was birthed in the family that day." Chris stated,

> My life and my family's life changed when I took the step to become a first-generation college student. It's bigger than me. I can change the narrative for my family. Throughout my feelings of anxiety, stress, and thoughts of giving up, I reflect on the day I made the announcement of my scholarship to my family. There is no way I can give up and let them down.

Students that persist academically are strong, zealous, and motivated, which permits them to deposit strong, academic contributions to themselves and their peers (Huerta et al., 2018). Xavier acknowledged,

Now that I am getting close to the end of my college experience, I have noticed that my confidence has increased, and I no longer question my academic abilities. I am proof to other first-generation, African American males that if you identify your support system, ignore the noise, and stay locked in, there is nothing you can't accomplish. I have experienced highs and a lot of lows, but I made it proving those who doubted me wrong.

First-generation, African American male students are often compelled to seek out support systems when they are faced with hardship (Fries-Britt & White-Lewis, 2020). Participants identified academic preparation as a source of concern as a first-generation, African American male student. The concern of academic preparation can affect the ability and desire of persistence in first-generation, African American male students (Savage et al., 2019). When adequate support is provided by mentors, friends, and family members, first-generation, African American male students have the ability to thrive and persist academically.

Sub-Question One

Sub-question One asked, "What role did participation in Black Male Initiatives play in first-generation, African American male academic persistence in a PWI?" The purpose of this sub-question was to determine the role Black Male Initiatives played in first-generation, African American male students' persistence. According to Maslow's (1943) human motivation theory, people are motivated by attaining basic needs of life such as food, shelter, and clothing, followed by the need for self-esteem. The theme of mentorship relates to Sub-question One. The findings of this study indicated that all participants perceived that meaningful support and mentorship influenced their desire to persist academically through the relationships developed with African American male members of the university faculty and staff. The participants of this study

acknowledged lower desires to persist academically before engaging in mentorship and Black male initiatives. Xavier said,

> I met my mentor during a very challenging time in my life as a student. When I met him, I was lost academically and in my life. Our constant conversations helped me realize that God has a plan for my life. Meeting him really changed my life and helped me understand the potential that I have inside. I work even harder in class because I know he is cheering me on, and I do not want to disappoint him.

All the participants acknowledged that mentorship provided them additional support, information, and resources required to persist academically. The participants also agreed that they learned how to deal with social issues after annually engaging in mentorship through Black Male Initiatives. Lemonte stated:

> Having a mentor who is an African American and who was the first in his family to do something different has been very helpful. He has made me feel comfortable and eased my transition into the university by sharing his experiences and how he dealt with similar situations I face daily. He often reminds me that he also faces similar situations as a professional on campus. His mentorship pushes me to keep going, not just for myself but for my family.

> Many of the participants stated that they were involved in Black Male Initiatives in some manner at their institution. Their responses confirmed what researchers indicated concerning the importance of first-generation, African American male students' involvement in Black Male Initiatives (Brooms, 2016). When first-generation, African American male students participate annually in Black Male Initiatives, they receive the encouragement to achieve academic matriculation and persistence (Simmons, 2019).

Sub-Question Two

Sub-question Two asked, "How do first-generation, African American male students describe their academic preparedness when enrolling into a primarily White institution?" The theme of academic awareness and resources relates to Sub-question Two. The absence of academic preparedness affects many first-generation, African American male students and often hinders opportunities to persist academically (Pratt et al., 2019). The research participants in this study indicated they believed they were academically prepared prior to the start of their college academic careers. Jeremy stated:

> In classes, I felt I was behind other students because I wasn't familiar with the content. When classes first started, the professor told us this will be a review of the information you already know. I felt extremely lost in class and often embarrassed when to asked to answer a question that I had no clue how to answer. It was strongly suggested to me by my professor that I receive tutoring and join a study group.

Academic preparedness and the lack of academic awareness are substantial barriers that often hinder first-generation, African American male students' academic persistence. When academic preparedness and awareness are absent, navigation of educational spaces can become a challenge, often leading to a lack of social and academic confidence (Pratt et al., 2019). Research indicates that when first-generation, African American male students lose academic confidence, they tend to select less rigorous courses and refrain from interactions with professors and academic staff due to academic embarrassment" (Ellis et al., 2019, p. 272). Jeremy stated:

> I was behind other students in classes because I was unfamiliar with the content. When classes started, the professor told us this would be a review of the information we already knew. I felt extremely lost in class and often embarrassed when asked a question I had no

clue how to answer. I was belittled by my professor and said I should I receive tutoring

and join a study group. Even after his recommendation, I hesitated to attend classes and

tutoring sessions.

Unfortunate interactions with professors and other academic personnel can also bruise the

confidence of first-generation, African American male students (Ellis et al., 2019). African

American, first-generation students often experience feelings of alienation (Neville & Parker,

2017). However, providing effective academic support systems that meet students where they are

academically can improve their academic confidence and success. The essential skills acquired

from effective academic support systems can improve academic performance, confidence, and

persistence.

Sub-Question Three

Sub-question Three asked, " How does intrusive academic advising affect perceptions

and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students?" The theme of

required participation in academic advising relates to Sub-question Three. Intrusive academic

advising strengthens the student's learning experience by providing, identifying, and developing

detailed education plans that promote academic persistence for first-generation, African

American male students to avoid academic pitfalls or place them at risk of failure (Johnson et al.,

2019). All the participants reflected on their experience participating in academic advising for

first-generation students at their university. Lemonte explained,

I'm somewhat relieved that I'm required to see my advisor throughout the semester.

Having a consistent dialog has helped me avoid taking worthless classes. Meeting often

has also pushed me to push myself and strive for a better academically. At first, it felt like

it was extra and worthless but I'm still in school, so the sessions are helping me.

In the participant focus group sessions, participants indicated intrusive academic advising allowed them and the advisor to proactively create plans for the semester and academic goals to provide motivation. Travis shared,

> During the academic sessions my advisor went through everything: highlighting how many credits I need to graduate on time, the resources I needed to use to improve my grades. At first it felt like it may have been overkill but now I'm starting to see how important it to help me stay on track.

All of the participants acknowledged that advising was a key contributor to their current academic standing and persistence. They all agreed that at the beginning of their academic endeavors, they needed to understand the importance of sitting down and reviewing their current academic status. Javon divulged,

> I was dreading my second advising meeting because I knew I slacked off a little and that there would consequences that affected my ability to participate in the clubs I'm apart of. I wasn't in trouble, but my advisor definitely let me know that I was not meeting the academic goals we set for the year at the time.

All the participants acknowledged that participating in intrusive academic advising provided them with a complete understanding of academic expectations for the academic year. They also expressed that having a set academic expectation of them encouraged them to academically persist throughout the semester. All the participants experienced various challenges but were determined not to give up and to academically persist.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to divulge the participants' lived experiences, thoughts, themes, and narratives that were produced through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and

surveys. The sum of 12 participants were involved in this research study. The themes of a belongingness and family expectations, academic preparation and resources, mentorship, family and camps relationships emerged in this study. The following chapter will provide implications of the research study, recommendations for future research, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and the conclusion. The themes provided answers to the central research question and three sub-questions in this research study, supplying an intellectual understanding of the role persistence plays for first-generation, African American males enrolled at four-year primarily White institutions. In this study, the findings were provided in narrative form and categorized by themes that emerged. The participants' responses were provided in quotation form to support the research questions of this study.

The results provided from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys confirmed that the basic needs of first-generation, African American male students must be met to achieve academic persistence. Participants of this study provided positive and negative encounters that affected their academic persistence. Essential components to persistence were thoroughly discussed. Participants addressed their needs of belongingness, relationships, and academic and social support to achieve academic persistence as first-generation, African American male students. All the participants of this study found the desire to persist as they actively encountered individuals and programs that equipped them with confidence through encouragement.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest. This study strived to reveal factors that impede the persistence and academic progress of first-generation, African American male students. This chapter will provide a summary of the study findings from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys. The goal of the research questions was to gain insight from first-generation, African American male students concerning academic preparedness and academic persistence. The semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys were transcribed to capture the essence of the lived experiences and conversations to fully understand the experience phenomena of a group of people (Van Manen, 2014). The data from this study was then analyzed by Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam method. The organized sets of data were then coded into significant themes. The four themes that emerged during the stated process are delineated in this chapter, along with the individual experiences of the participants. The summary of findings will also include implications of the research study, recommendations for future research, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and the conclusion.

Discussion

This transcendental, phenomenological study explored the perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest. Maslow's (1943) human motivation theory served as the theoretical framework of this study. This study shared the lived experiences

of first-generation, African American male students assisting individuals in understanding their unique experiences. Data were collected by utilizing semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys in this study, providing awareness into the lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students that attended a primarily White institution in the Midwest. The themes that emerged were belongingness and family expectations, academic preparation and resources, mentorship, family and campus relationships.

The central research question desired to be answered, "What are the perceptions and lived experiences of first generation, African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest?" For first-generation, African American male students to academically persist, they encountered many challenges throughout their academic journey. Their lived experiences were comprised of overcoming many trials and tribulations. The 12 first-generation, African American male students of this study faced obstacles of anxiety, lack of financial support, racism, stress, and uncertainty as they fought to fulfill the desire to academically persist. The participants of this study forged new generational trails by entering an institution of higher learning to obtain a degree. The need for supportive relationships to academically thrive was present in all 12 participants. While all the participants dealt with moments of self-defeat, frustration, and lack of motivation, they sought to preserve not only for themselves but for their families and other individuals who provided support.

The first sub-question was, "How do first-generation, African American male students describe their academic preparedness when enrolling into a primarily White institution?" Persistence is defined in this study as continued enrollment (or degree completion) at any higher education institution, including one different from the institution of initial enrollment in the fall

(Zemack-Rugar et al., 2021). Persistence describes the participants of this study and their daily efforts to academically thrive and achieve a college degree. The participants were able to thrive when their basic needs were met. However, when those basic needs were not met, participants experienced a lack of belongingness, anxiety, anger, and academic confidence.

The second sub-question was, "How do first-generation African American male students describe their academic preparedness when enrolling into a primarily White institution?" The 12 participants of this study acknowledged that they believed they were academically prepared until they entered the college lecture hall. Lack of academic preparation contributes greatly to low academic persistence of first-generation, African American male students (Wallace & Gagen, 2020). The third sub-question was, " How does intrusive academic advising affect perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students?" Research indicates that intrusive academic advising increases opportunities for academic advisors to provide adequate information to increase student learning and avoid academic pitfalls (Johnson et al., 2019). The 12 participants of this study indicated that their participation in intrusive academic advising provided them with the knowledge, tools, and motivation required to academically persist. The participants acknowledged that they were able to achieve positive academic persistence when they utilized the information provided by their academic advisors.

Interpretation of Findings

Chapter Two of this research study incorporated a discussion of the theoretical framework, which consists of Maslow's (1943) human motivation theory. Maslow's human motivation theory was selected to explore why first-generation, African American males do not persist as their peers from other ethnic groups enrolled in four-year PWIs. An examination of the

results of this study resulted in the researcher's interpretations, which are discussed in detail in the upcoming paragraphs.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The four themes that emerged through data analysis were belongingness and family expectations, academic preparation and resources, mentorship, family and campus relationships. The themes answered the research study's central research question and sub-questions. The following are the interpretation and the thematic findings of this study.

Desire to Academically Achieve, But Unprepared for the Social and Academic Journey. First-generation, African American male students have the desire to achieve high academic accomplishments but are often unprepared when advancing into higher education. Often the absence of study skills, family support, adapting to a new environment, time management, and the pressure of being the first in the family to pursue higher education can significantly impact academic persistence (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; Hines et al., 2020a; Means & Pyne, 2017). The consistent responses of the participants highlighted the importance of academic support and preparation. The participants acknowledged not being fully prepared for what they faced academically when they first arrived at the institution. Jeremy stated,

> I was behind other students in classes because I was unfamiliar with the content. When classes started, the professor told us this would be a review of the information we already knew. I felt extremely lost in class and often embarrassed when asked a question I had no clue how to answer.

All the participants acknowledged the feeling of anxiety and stress when they faced social adversity and that they had times of being academically unprepared.

Participants expressed not understanding the difference in the social atmosphere at the university. Lemonte expressed:

> When I first arrived on campus for team workouts, a few of my teammates, who are also African American, told me it is different here, bro. You may not get the same love you would get at other schools; it is just different here. I told them probably for you all, but I am Lemonte. Everyone loves me. I learned really quick what they meant about this being a different atmosphere. When I enter campus buildings with security stations at the entrance, I am constantly stopped and asked to show my student ID while my white peers walk right by with no problem.

The participants of this study felt disconnected, lacking a sense of belonging at the institution (Brooms, 2018b).

Academic Preparation and Resources. The motivation to succeed is derived from one's readiness to accept challenges to achieve a desired goal. Insufficient motivation will deprive a person of the opportunity to achieve any desired goals. The participants of this study earning a college degree are linked to motivation, academic preparedness, and support systems (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Davidson et al., 2020; Jones, 2020; Xu & Lancaster, 2017). The desire to attend college and attain a college degree was for diverse reasons: financial gain, fulfilling parents' dreams, self-improvement, and better opportunities. The participants used various support systems to gain motivation to strive to accomplish their desired educational goals throughout all forms of adversity.

Black Support in a Primarily White Environment. Positive social support influences positive academic persistence. Maslow's hierarchy of needs indicated individuals require psychological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs to be met to feel supported.

The participants stated they felt supported once they began annual participation in the university's Black male group. The Black male group provided the first-generation, African American students the opportunity to engage members of their university community that were from similar backgrounds and conveyed similar desires to attain a college degree. Participants affirmed that their engagement with the Black male group provided them the opportunity to receive mentorship and academic guidance. Javon stated:

> Having a mentor keeps me grounded and accountable to someone outside of my family. Having someone who has accomplished what I am working towards has been helpful. My mentor has also helped me craft strategies to become a stronger student by having weekly and often daily conversations to ensure I stay focused and do my part.

Being a first-generation, African American male student on a primarily white campus can present challenges. However, receiving guidance from a supportive relationship can assist in navigating unfamiliar and uncomfortable environments (Simmons, 2019).

Implications for Policy or Practice

As the researcher, I endeavored to understand the lived experiences of 12, first-generation, African American male students enrolled at a primarily White institution in the Midwest. This research identified factors that motivate first-generation, African American male students to academically persist. I found that all 12 participants faced challenging circumstances that required them to have the support of basic needs to overcome and academically persist. The purpose of this section is to provide recommendations for policy and practice for policymakers and administrators in higher education to provide the proper support and motivation needed for first-generation, African American to academically persist.

Implications for Policy

I recommend that administrators of higher education institutions of primarily White institutions with first-generation, African American male students review their academic support policies to provide adequate support systems, such as Black Male Initiatives for first-generation, African American male students. The institution's academic support policy needs to include adequate programming and resources to provide the necessary support to encourage first-generation, African American male students to academically persist by providing mentors and academic and financial resources. The mentors within the Black Male Initiative should be knowledgeable of the academic and social barriers that exist for first-generation, African American male students and fully trained to provide academic advising and counseling to offer the full support needed to achieve academic excellence and persistence through graduation.

Implications for Practice

Odonald Hill University and other regional, primarily White intuitions and minority-serving institutions should create partnerships that would allow first-generation, African American male students to participate in conferences and activities that encourage academic persistence of first-generation, African American male students to create a supportive network that extends outside of the university. This action will display that the university is actively creating practical strategies to improve the retention, persistence, and matriculation of first-generation, African American male students at primarily white institutions in the Midwest and beyond.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This research study confirmed previous research conducted regarding first-generation, African American male students. Prior research incorporates the theoretical framework of this

research study. Maslow's (1943) human motivation theory was able to capture the essence of the lived experiences of the participants of this study. Maslow's human motivation theory emphasizes the significance of the basic needs of psychological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs must be met for academic persistence to be achieved. There were gaps in the literature of prior research concerning first-generation, African American male students. This research study confirmed the importance of functional strategies needed to support first-generation, African American male students and how Black Male Initiatives can improve academic motivation, persistence, and sense of belonging when supportive resources are available and utilized by first-generation, African American male students. Semi-structured interviews provided beneficial, first-hand information. Focus groups and surveys assisted in validating what was expressed during the semi-structured interviews.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations existed in this research study. Limitations were not forecasted or influenced as their existence could not be prognosticated by the researcher. The delimitations of this study were preplanned and determined when the framework of this study was created. A true understanding of limitations and delimitations should be evaluated when extrapolating this study's findings. Limitations and delimitations are examined in the following paragraphs.

Limitations

The limitations of this transcendental, phenomenological study were not intentionally planned. A limitation of this study was the limited senior first-generation, African American male student participation from the Midwest regions of the United States. Utilizing additional senior first-generation, African American male students who attended primarily White

institutions would have provided additional insight into this research study. The platform utilized to capture data from the participants provided limitations due to the technical difficulties that occurred. An additional limitation was the participants' limited time schedules due to their academic and extra-curricular commitments. Lastly, this research study captured data from students who were able to overcome academic and social obstacles that can harm academic persistence. Excluding first-generation male students who dropped out or were academically dismissed as first-semester freshmen produced an absence of data that contributed to their academic inadequacy.

Delimitations

Delimitations are present to clarify the boundaries of this research study and are voluntary choices devised by the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Transcendental phenomenology was selected for this study because it allowed the researcher to develop essential textural and structural descriptions of the totality of participants' lived experiences. The utilization of transcendental phenomenology provoked the use of purposive sampling because all participants must have a personal encounter with the phenomenon and be inclined to articulate their experiences in great detail (Patton, 2015). Delimitations also included participant selection being limited to first-generation, African American males who attended a primarily White institution in the Midwest. Narrowing this study to the selected location allowed the researcher to attenuate outcomes and focus on first-generation African American males in the Midwest region of the United States. Only first-generation, African American students who attended a primarily White institution in the Midwest were recruited. These requirements were selected to provide a detailed set of results.

Recommendation for Future Research

The researcher recommends future research be conducted concerning first-generation, African American male students who attend primarily White institutions. There is a need for additional understanding of the lived experiences of first-generation, African American male students to address the various barriers they must conquer to achieve academic persistence. Future researchers should understand the importance of Black Male Initiatives and the positive influence they can have when implemented and supported correctly. A final recommendation for future research is a comprehensive analysis with updated data from the National Center for Education Statistics concerning retention and graduation rates for four-year, minority-serving institutions in higher education compared to four-year, primarily White institutions, focusing on creating solutions for increased retention and graduations for both types of institutions to eradicate the achievement gap in the United States.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of first generation, African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year, primarily White institutions in the Midwest. Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation provided the theoretical framework for this study. This study sought to address the necessary strategies and support systems required to improve the persistence rates of first-generation, African American male students. Persistence was defined in this study as continued enrollment (or degree completion) at any higher education institution, including one different from the institution of initial enrollment in the fall (Zemack-Rugar et al., 2021). The participants' lived experiences were captured and examined by use of semi-structured

interviews, focus groups, and surveys using Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam method for data analysis.

During the study, it was found that participants were able to achieve academic persistence by engaging in Black Male Initiatives and participating in required academic advising and mentorship. All 12 participants saw an increase in their sense of belonging when they engaged in meaningful relationships that offered academic and social support. Participants found safety and renewed academic and social confidence when annually involved in Black Male Initiatives within the university, learning valuable lessons and strategies to combat obstacles that existed throughout the university. Their continued desire to persist has allowed them to face and overcome many of the challenges they face as first-generation, African American male students who attend a primarily White institution in the Midwest. They are champions and examples of what can be achieved through motivation and supportive programs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 20, 2023

Daniel Lee
Susan Stanley

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY22-23-690 AN EXPLORATION OF THE ROLE PERSISTENCE PLAYS FOR FIRST-GENERATION AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES ENROLLED AT FOUR YEAR PRIMARILY WHITE INSTITUTIONS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Daniel Lee, Susan Stanley,

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: February 20, 2023. 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: Recruitment Flyer

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS:

FIRST-GENERATION AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENT RESEARCH STUDY

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Daniel M. Lee. Participation in this study is voluntary. Information regarding the purpose of the study is listed below. In order to participate, you must be a first-generation African American male college student at least 18 years of age with an academic classification ranging from second-semester first-year students, sophomores, juniors, and seniors enrolled in various academic studies.

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you have any questions or desire additional information before certifying participation in the study, you may contact the researcher by email at   .

Appendix C:

FACEBOOK

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD in Higher Education Administration Leadership at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to gain understanding of the perceptions and lived experiences of first generation African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year primarily White institutions (PWI) in the Midwest. You must have graduated from the metropolitan school system and the school you are enrolled in must be a PWI in the Midwest United States. To participate, you must be 18 to 22 years of age, with an academic classification ranging from second semester first-year students, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and enrolled in various academic studies within the last 5 years or must have graduated from a PWI. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a one-on-one confidential interview (30 mins-1 hour), an anonymous survey (30-45 mins), and a confidential focus group (30 min-1 hour). Member checking will occur by each participant receiving a copy of his interview transcript to ensure their responses were accurately captured. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. The survey however will be completely anonymous.

If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria. Please contact me at ███████████████ for more information.

A consent document will be emailed to you after you contact me with an interest to participate, and you will need to sign and return it. The consent document contains additional information about my research. The consent form must be completed before participation in this research study. Please return consent form by email to ███████████████ by March 3, 2023. Participants will receive a $50.00 visa gift card for participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Daniel M. Lee
Researcher
████████████████

Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

Dear potential participant:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University. I am conducting research to better understand first-generation African American male student persistence at primarily White institutions. Last week an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to sign the consent form and respond if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is March 15, 2023.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a confidential one-on-one interview (30 – 1 hour), an anonymous survey (30-45 min), and a confidential focus group (30 min-1 hour). Member checking will occur by each participant receiving a copy of their interview transcript to ensure their responses were accurately captured. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. The surveys however will be completely anonymous.

If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria. Please contact me at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ for more information.

A consent document will be emailed to you after you contact me with an interest to participate, and you will need to sign and return it. The consent document contains additional information about my research. The consent form must be completed before participation in this research study can begin. Please return consent form by email to ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ by March 3, 2023.

Participants will receive a $50.00 Visa gift card for participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Daniel M. Lee
Researcher
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

APPENDIX D: Participant Thank You Letter

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in my study "What are the perceptions and lived experiences of first-generation African American male students concerning their persistence at four-year primarily White institutions in the Midwest." I greatly appreciate your willingness to meet with me for the upcoming semi-structured interview, focus group, and survey. Your willingness to share your thoughts about lived experiences is greatly appreciated.

The semi-structured interview will be February 24-26 at 3:00 pm, and the focus groups will meet on March 4 at 5:00 pm. Both the semi-structured interview and focus group will be virtual. After the conclusion of the interview and focus groups, you will receive a google survey. Please complete and return the google survey within 48 hours of receipt to ██████████████.

Sincerely,

Daniel M. Lee
Researcher
██████████████

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM

Consent

Title of the Project: AN EXPLORATION OF THE ROLE PERSISTENCE PLAYS FOR FIRST-GENERATION AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES ENROLLED AT FOUR YEAR INSTITUTIONS: A PHENOMEMNOLOGIAL STUDY

Principal Investigator: Daniel M. Lee, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University, School of Education 2023

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Daniel M. Lee. Participation in this study is voluntary. Information regarding the purpose of the study is listed below. In order to participate, you must be a first-generation African American male college student who 18 to 22 years of age with an academic classification ranging from second semester first-year students, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and enrolled in various academic studies within the last 5 years or must have graduated from a predominantly white institution (PWI). You must have graduated from the metropolitan school system and the school you are enrolled in must be a PWI in the Midwest United States. Taking part in this research study 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 phenomenological study is to understand academic persistence in first-generation African American male students enrolled at four-year primarily White institutions.

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 a 30-minute – 1-hour video-recorded interview on Zoom.
2. Complete a 30-minute – 1-hour video-recorded focus group session with other research participants on Zoom. Focus groups will have 3 to 4 participants that will be arbitrarily constructed.
3. Complete a 30 – 45-minute web-based anonymous survey.
4. Participants will have the option to check transcripts from their recorded interviews for correctness. Participants will receive transcripts through secure email and dispatched back to the researcher through email.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

The aspiration of this study's findings is that the data collected will be beneficial for improving first-generation African American male student persistence enrolled in four-year primarily white higher education institutions.

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.

- Participants' interviews and focus groups responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Participants' survey responses will be anonymous.
- Interviews and focus groups will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- 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.
- 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/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.

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

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Participants will receive a $50.00 Visa gift card. Email addresses will be requested for compensation purposes; however, they will be pulled and separated from your responses to maintain your anonymity.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Daniel M. Lee. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ███████████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Susan Stanley at ███████████████████.

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

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

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

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

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

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

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX F: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about yourself and your understanding of a first-generation college student? CRQ

2. What inspired you to attend a Primarily White Institution PWI? SQ1

3. What challenges did you expect to encounter as a student before attending a primarily White institution? SQ1

4. How do you utilize support systems in the university? SQ1

5. What academic strategies have you identified and utilized this academic term to assist in your matriculation? SQ1

6. What spaces/places on campus do you find comfortable as a student at the university? SQ1

7. In what ways are you involved in a first-generation/Black male support system at the university? SQ2

8. When were you made aware of campus resources? SQ2

9. What obstacles/challenges have you encountered being a first-generation African American male on a Primarily White Institution PWI campus? SQ2

10. Have you ever needed mentorship? SQ2

11. When did you identify the need for mentorship as a first-generation African American male student on campus? SQ2

12. Please characterize your encounters and relationships with your professors? SQ2

13. In what ways have you encountered racial bias while enrolled at the university. SQ3

14. Please characterize your encounters with your fellow students. SQ3

15. How often have you considered transferring or withdrawing from the institution? SQ3

16. What resources would assist you in your matriculation as a first-generation African

    American male? SQ3

17. Do you have anything else you would like to add? SQ3

APPENDIX G: Focus Group Questions

1. What relationships on campus have encouraged or discouraged your academic persistence? CRQ

2. Describe how engaging in Black Male Initiatives encouraged you as a first-generation African American male student to persist academically? SQ1

3. As a first-generation African American male student, how did adversity within the institution influence your engagement in Black Male Initiatives on campus? SQ1

4. What academic experiences encouraged you to create academic strategies to assist in your matriculation? SQ2

5. How has intrusive academic advising improved your academic performance and lived experiences as a first-generation African American male student? SQ3

APPENDIX H: Survey Questions

1.   What do you believe contributes to first-generation African American males'

       academic persistence enrolled at four-year primarily White institutions? CRQ

2.   Describe how your experience in the Black Male Initiative influenced your

       involvement with academic advising throughout the academic year? SQ1

3.   As a first-generation African American male student, describe some of the

       challenges you encountered within your institution. SQ2

4.   How did your involvement with academic advising throughout the academic year

       influence your academic persistence? SQ3

APPENDIX I: AUDIT TRAIL

Date	Entry
February 1, 2023	Submitted IRB Application
February 3, 2023	Created practice zoom session to familiarize settings for future participant meetings
February 20, 2023	Received IRB Approval
February 20, 2023	Posted Recruitment Flyer to Facebook group
February 24, 2023	Reviewed participants
February 24, 2023	Sent recruitment letters
February 27-March 4, 2023	Conducted semi-structured interviews and Focus groups
March 4 -7 2023	Transcribed semi-structured interviews and focus group session; Sent transcription to participants for member checks; Received from participants.
March 11, 2023	Completed and submitted to chair for review.