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First-Generation Black Males' Challenges in Attending a PWI: Understanding What Makes Them Persist

Shakeitra Simmons
Eastern Illinois University

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First-Generation Black Males' Challenges in attending a PWI:

Understanding what makes them persist.

Shakeitra Simmons

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Abstract

Using qualitative methodology, the researcher studied the challenges and persistence factors for undergraduate First-generation Black males to persist at a Predominantly White Institution. Through conducting six one-on-one semi-structured interviews, the researcher identified the challenges faced by this group of students as mental health, lack of support, and racism/microaggressions. The researcher also identified the factors for persistence at the PWI to be upward mobility, family and school personnel support, and campus involvement.

Keywords: First-generation, Black males, PWI, persistence

This thesis is dedicated to my guardian angel, my grandmother Beautymae. Thank you for always being my biggest teacher and supporter. I wish you were here, but I know that heaven couldn't wait for you.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Dorothy West (1995) once said, "To know how much there is to know is the beginning of learning to live" (p. 30). Attending an institution of higher education and receiving knowledge is associated with enhancing one's lifestyle. Higher education is continuing to offer vital opportunities for people to achieve both occupational success and social status, now many people value higher education seeing as though they are able to access it (Longwell-Grice, Adsitt, Mullins, & Serrata, 2016). According to the United States Department of Education, in 2016 Blacks represented 36% of those enrolled in post-secondary education; and of this population 56 % were female while Black males only comprised 44%. Black men remain one of the most underrepresented groups in higher education (Kim & Hargrove, 2013), when compared to the general college-age population (Hall, 2017; Palmer, Wood, Dancy & Strayhorn, 2014).

The educational gap between White and Black students enrolled in a degree-granting institution decreased from 87% in 1990 to 74% in 2013 because of more students from each race enrolling, there still remains a significant gap in completion rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Over the years, there have been more opportunities for those who identify as Black to attend college; however, in comparison to other ethnic groups they still have a lower matriculation rate when it comes to receiving their bachelor's degree (Spruill, Hirt, & Mo, 2014). The United States Department of Education (2016) reported the graduation rates for Black students over six years was 40% with Black males graduating at a rate of only 34% compared to Black females who were graduating at a rate of 44% and White males at the rate of 61%. With these men being given the opportunities to attend college, there is still a question as to why they are not graduating at the same rates as their peers. When looking at gender gaps concerning

minority graduates, Black males and Black females have the most significant gap disparity (Reid, 2013).

Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation lists thirteen (13) conclusions, and one of them states that human needs have a hierarchal arrangement based upon predominance. One need usually is dependent upon the prior satisfaction of another pre-potent need (Maslow, 1943). When looking at African American males' persistence to graduation, their persistence when compared to other demographics decreases significantly over time. (Hall, 2017; Musu-Gillette, Robinson, McFarland, Kewal Ramani, Zhang, & Wilson-Flicker, 2016). Persistence is unlikely to be obtained if there is a lack of motivation and the effort that it creates (Tinto, 2017). Maslow (1943) stated that there are at least five sets of basic needs. The five basic needs are as follows: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. Additionally, we are motivated by the desire to reach a place where we can maintain the various conditions that would allow us to be satisfied with these needs and other intellectual desires as well (Maslow, 1943). To get to a place of persistence, a student must first be self-motivated and have a level of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can be described as one's belief in their own abilities to succeed in a specific situation (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy is the building block when it comes to a student achieving persistence (Tinto, 2017).

When focusing on Black males, it is worth noting that many are also first-generation students, and this adds to the lower college enrollment rate in comparison to those who are not first-generation (Cataldi, Bennett, Chen, 2018). Having a social support system plays an important role in persistence, especially in first-generation, low-income, and part-time students. These populations of students tend to have a greater challenge with enrolling in college (Tinto, 2017).

Many colleges are not doing enough to meet the needs of the increasing number of first-generation college students, it may be due to a lack of an institutional structure that identifies that population of students or lack of funding. Tinto (1999) stated that institutions should recognize the root of the students' challenges in order to be serious about student retention. Institutions play a big role in motivating students and this can only be done by understanding both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate them to remain in college (Petty, 2014).

First-generation college students tend to feel disconnected from their peers due to their first-generation status, and they also feel as though they don't matter to the university (DeRosa & Dolby, 2014). First-generation students seemingly work more hours at their jobs, are less likely to live in university provided housing, and have a greater chance that their parents are unable to assist them with financial-aid forms (Skomsvold, 2015). Some efforts to support this population can include improving pre-college preparation, increasing access to financial aid and easing the transition to college (Engle, 2007). However, college access and success programs across the country are growing. These programs target low-income, minority, and first-generation students. TRIO and GEAR UP still remain the most well-known and long-standing federally funded programs that specifically targets and provides resources for first-generation students (Engle, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine and identify the motivating factors for first-generation Black male persistence toward the completion of their respective degree programs at a mid-sized university located in the Midwest. This was done by conducting semi-structured interviews with first-generation Black males. The motivation for this study stems from my own lived experiences as a first-generation minority student at a public four-year university.

Research Questions

      This study was designed to gain insight into what influences first-generation Black males' persistence in higher education programs. This was addressed by answering the following research questions:

      RQ 1: What challenges do Black males face in coming to a Predominantly White Institution?

      RQ 2: What influences Black males to persist at the institution?

Significance of the Study

      As a first-generation Black female, I have had many advisors, faculty, and authority figures at my undergraduate institution that looked like myself. These women eventually became mentors in my life. Unfortunately, I know that my male counterparts were not able to say the same. I am able to count the number of Black men in advising, faculty, and authority positions that I interacted with at my undergraduate institution on both of my hands. Thus, being a Black female and having the representation that I had, I felt empowered. It is my hope that Black men can have that same feeling someday. Many of these authority figures had a similar background as me and that played a big role in my continuing education at my undergraduate institution. My male counterparts, unfortunately, had very few men at our institution that looked like them and understood their needs.

      Identifying the retention factors identified by participants will benefit the university's services by allowing administrators to design programs geared toward reaching those factors that help this underrepresented group succeed. This study can help in the implementation of programs that help with student retention initiatives. This study is also important because it will help others

gain a better understanding of how first-generation students overcome the obstacles that they are faced with daily.

Limitations

As with most studies, there were some potential limitations with this study. This qualitative study focused on first-generation Black males who have completed at least four semesters at the institution. When it comes to this study, the group of students were closer to graduating, which may not prove toward providing recommendations for freshmen or recently admitted students. This information was also obtained from six first-generation Black males and is not representative of all Black men or first-generation students, however the population was selected to answer the selected research questions.

This study was conducted at a mid-sized university in the rural Midwest, which means this may not provide the best results for other institutions based on the location and population of students on this particular campus. The results and adaptability of the findings may not be pertinent to some institutions. At the institution where the study is being conducted, there are few resources for Black males. Resources are limited to faculty and staff, a mentoring group and student organizations such as NAACP, and the Black Student Union. Therefore, it is important to identify what other resources can be put into place to support Black men. By hearing from them regarding their experiences we were able to get a better perspective on where they turn for help and support identifying the obstacles they perceive to be hindering their success.

Choosing to focus solely on Black males, this study further limits those seeking to focus on any other group because the experiences of the Black male are unique to the group. As a Black female, I do not fully understand the perspective or experiences of these Black male students. Thus, I have two Black males on my thesis committee who can identify more with the

experiences of the potential participants. Additionally, I have researched various methods to conducting qualitative research. I conducted my interviews in a manner that provided the best opportunity to gain insight into the experiences of the participants and allow them to speak in a space where they were most comfortable. The results are presented in a way that lets the participants speak for their experiences rather than the research speaking for them.

Definitions of Terms

  Black/African American. Any person whom can be identified as being a member of the African diaspora (words are interchangeable) but I will use Black throughout this study in talking about the population.

  First-Generation Student. A student whose natural/adoptive parents did not receive a baccalaureate degree; an individual who, prior to the age of 18, regularly resided with and received support from only one parent and whose supporting parent did not receive a baccalaureate degree (TRiO Programs, HEA §402C; 20 U.S.C. §1070a-13; 34 C.F.R. 645)

  Persistence. Continued enrollment or degree completion at any institution. (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015)

  Retention. Continuous matriculation or receiving a degree at the same institution for the fall semester of a student's first and second year. (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015)

Summary

  First-generation students are a growing population and are faced with many barriers to success. Being both a Black male and a first-generation college student can provide many unique challenges. Thus, these students often look to their institutions for support in order for successful

degree completion. Chapter two will consist of the literature that has been done on Black males

and first-generation college students.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The following is a review of literature focusing on what a first-generation college student is, their support or lack thereof at their institutions, academic preparedness, and the perceived struggles they face. The review also focuses on Black males and factors involved in their educational experiences. This chapter will review the theoretical framework of Maslow's (1943) Theory of Human Motivation and explain how it pertains to first-generation Black males. Additionally, this chapter will use Astin's(1984) Student Involvement Theory to further explain Black males and their institutional involvement.

Black Males in Higher Education

According to the U.S Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2018), there were over 30.5 million individuals between the ages of 18-24 in the United States, and Black individuals account for over 4.3 million. Black students make up 15.4% at 6.6 million people in the K-12 system (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), and represented just 15% of those in public high schools in 2016. Black men accounted for 31.3% of 18-24-year olds enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in 2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Of those Black Males 18-24 years of age only 33% had completed their high school degree, 5% had completed an associate degree, and 9% had earned a bachelor's degree. Compare this to the data provided by the U.S. Department of Education (2017) on Black males, who are 25-29 years, which reports that 30% of this population has a high school diploma, 9% have an associate degree, and 26% have a bachelor's degree.

These numbers provide insight in to how they are obtaining their education in more non-traditional ways because of different priorities and commitments they face in their early 20s. The

graduation rates are lower than their White male peers as well as their Black female counterparts, and one must look at the various factors influencing these outcomes beginning with the K-12 educational system. This section will also provide information about the Black males in higher education as well as cultural influences, and the societal portrayals of Black males throughout the media.

Black males in the K-12 system. Scott, Taylor, and Palmer (2013) did a qualitative study where they worked with a non-profit organization and collecting scholarship essays from college-bound Black male high school seniors. The self-reported challenges they found that were facing Black males were: lack of African American male teachers, low expectations from teachers, lack of mentorship and positive images of Black males in society, and family and community support (Scott et al., 2013).

When looking at the dropout rates for persons between 16 to 24 years old, Black males have the second highest dropout rate with a rate of 8.2, with the highest rate being Hispanic males (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). This number can then be compared to black females who have a rate of 4.3, which also happens to be the lowest rate among all racial groups. This is a clear-cut example of the educational disparity among Black men and women. Addis & Withington (2016) stated that young males of color made up a high percentage of the nation's population that have not graduated from high school and that when they make the decision to drop out of school it is usually inevitable and due to things that are occurring in their lives. They went on to claim that improving graduation rates is a key step to getting young men of color on a path of economic self-sufficiency.

Strayhorn, Lo, Travers and Tillman-Kelly (2015) did a study on 18 Black male collegians who participated in a four-day early arrival transition program. The purpose of the study was to

assess the relationship between one's confidence in their transition to college and their sense of belonging and measures of well-being. They did both a pre-test, post-test, and then they followed up with individual and group interviews. The researchers found that Black males in the study who felt confident about their college transitions also tended to report that they had felt a sense of belonging in college. The Black males in the sample who lacked confidence in their transitioning tended to lack a sense of belonging during their first year (Strayhorn et.al, 2015).

Cultural and economic information. Family is a major source of support for African American students during the entire continuum of their educational careers (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). Family involvement and constant support during a student's higher education journey increase their chances of persistence (Sledge, 2012). Causey, Livingston & High (2015) did a study to assess the impact that parental involvement, racial socialization, social support, and family structure had on the self-esteem of African American college students. The researchers did a correlation survey with 98 African American college students. The study found that social support and parental involvement were significant contributors to the self-esteem development of African American adults. Participants indicated on the survey which type of family they were raised in (one-parent, two-parent, or extended family). Researchers then examined which family structure was consistently linked to healthy self-esteem in African American youth. They found that the family structure and upbringing of a child has strong implications for their well-being (Causey et., al 2015).

According to the United States Census Bureau's (2018) America's Families and Living Arrangements Chart for Children, nearly 4 million of the over 11 million Black children under the age of 18 live in a home with both parents who are married to each other. This is almost one quarter of the youth population. This can be compared to the 37.5 million of over 53 million

White children, or more than half, who live with both parents who are married (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Having familial and social support creates additional positive outcomes for African American children such as higher self-esteem (Causey et., al 2015).

The United States Census Bureau (2019) Income and Poverty in the United States income summary measures selected characteristics from 2017 and 2018 revealed that Black households had a median income of $41,361. This can be compared to White, non-Hispanic households who had an average income of $70,642. Black households had the least amount of income, with Hispanic and Asian households both having a household income that was greater than $41,361 (U.S Census Bureau, 2019). It is erroneous to believe that all or most Black males come from disadvantaged economic backgrounds (Holloman, 2010). According to Gordon (2012), Blacks make up about one third of those living in suburban communities and their children represent that same number in the suburban school districts. Gordon completed a qualitative study to explore the lived educational experiences of four high-achieving Black male students from middle-class families who were attending White affluent suburban high schools. The socio-economic status of those living in an affluent White suburban community may not be enough to erase the presence of race and racism in regard to Black males and their school experiences (Gordon, 2012).

Sledge (2012) stated that families who have a higher socio-economic status often achieve a higher level of education and are also involved in educational experiences outside of academia. Families with a higher SES may be able to offer more educational enrichment and travel opportunities for their children than those who belong to a lower SES (Sledge, 2012). These types of opportunities can impact the academic ambitions of students. Palardy (2013) did a study that utilized the data from the Education Longitudinal study of 2002 to examine the link between

high school socio-economic composition (SEC) and the outcome it had on high school

graduation and college enrollment. In the study, he found that students who attend a high school

with a high SEC are 68% more likely to enroll at a 4-year college when compared to those who

attend low SEC high schools. Palardy (2013) stated that school-based segregation has been a

long-standing issue when it comes to educational equality in American schools. According to

Palardy (2013), it is necessary to integrate public schools in order to address those negative

effects that may come with attending a low SEC school.

When family members are familiar with the academic experience, then they can provide

students with that knowledge and offer them the assistance they need to be prepared with

financial awareness, appropriate school supplies, the technology needed, and so on (Sledge,

2012). Knowing how to start out strong in college is passed down to students, and for first

generation students this can be one of the greatest challenges only compounded by the Black

identity. Sledge (2012) stated in their literature review journal article that a person's family

makeup contributes to their success in life and who they become. The article also identified that

for Black students, there is a strong cultural identity that is learned before college. Gordon

(2012) in his study with the four Black students in high school found that these Black students in

suburban schools still underperformed when compared to their White peers.

Societal portrayal of Black males. The media and popular press use words that have

negative connotations to describe Black men (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016) and this in turn tends to

reinforce the negative stereotypes that their White peers and teachers have of them (Strayhorn &

Terrell, 2010). "Stereotypes create threatening environments for Black males on campus causing

social, psychological, and academic effects of Black male collegiate success" (Boyd, 2017, p. 4).

Harper (2015) did a study of Black males where he investigated how they both responded to and

resisted internalizing the racist stereotypes that they experienced at the PWIs they attended. A

participant stated that after football games he got used to peers telling him congrats on the win

even though he isn't an athlete at the institution, but his white peers assumes that he is (Harper,

2015). Many stereotypes of Black men are conveyed through microaggressions (Harper, 2015).

Participants in Harper's study stated that White peers asked seemingly innocent questions and or

made comments to them, such as "you from the hood?" and "you got weed?" (Harper 659).

 Currently, the racial issues with law enforcement in the country has led to the deaths of

many Black males. In an article about unarmed Black males being demonized and criminalized,

Smiley & Fakunle (2016) aim to address the micro-aggressions and coded language used to

identify persons of color and the way in which the "White-dominated media" portrays

information to viewers. They also look into how Black males who are killed by law enforcement

are turned into "thugs" to somehow justify their death. They do this by investigating some of the

more common deaths of unarmed Black males that have been in the media such as: Freddie

Gray, Eric Garner, Tony Robinson, and Tamir Rice.

 Smiley & Fakunle (2016) posed a question as to whether it was necessary for the media

to mention that Eric Garner was 6'3, 400 pounds, and had a medical issue prior to his death.

They ask readers whether these bits of information gave persons negative misconceptions and

bias about the individuals. In the article, they also touch on President Obama using the term

"criminals and thugs" on April 28, 2015 to refer to a group of Baltimore citizens when answering

a question. The focus was on the way in which the words were used to characterize individuals

who were primarily a group of Black males. Smiley & Fakunle (2016) state that "thug" has

become a way to describe Black males who reject the standard of White America, and thus is a

part of the coded language being used to identify such individuals. It is important to note that

Black men are facing many stereotypes.

Black Males Access to Higher Education. As a population in general, Black persons have not always had an equal opportunity to receive an education. The recognized *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* was intended to rid society and the educational system of the inequalities that held Black individuals at a disadvantage (Harper, 2008). As we are in the post-Brown era there are still racial and gender inequities in schools where there is a larger concentration of African Americans students such as Southern states and urban centers (Harper, 2008).

Bridges (2011) conducted a study on the Black male college experience. He also researched the history of America and its relationship with Black males and identified it as one that is acrimonious. In a qualitative study conducted with three different focus groups, Bridges examined the impact of racial identity on the Black males' experience at a PWI. More specifically, Bridges wanted to know how their racial identity influenced their ability to develop healthy psychological coping strategies. Bridges found that Black males are faced with many sociocultural, academic, and negative stressors and they impact both their identity development and relationships. Bridges also wanted to know what the factors were that led to these men being academically successful at the institution, which included relationships with other African American peers, family members, and relationships with African American women. However, to understand the Black male experience in higher education we have to understand the current climate surrounding Black males.

It is important to acknowledge the factors that Black men have had to overcome to not only get into college, but to graduate high school. These risk factors make getting into college an accomplishment in and of itself. Some of these risk factors include: a lack of college preparation,

socio-economic status, and first-generation status. Hilton & Bonner (2017) stated that finding the right school was only one of the many obstacles that most Black males had to face when it comes to higher education. Lacking experience about higher education usually affects the decision-making process for some Black males (Hilton & Bonner, 2017).

Some of the challenges facing first-generation Black males are lack of support, lack of academic preparedness, first-generation status, racial issues and feelings of isolation (Palmer et al., 2014; Scott et al., 2013; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). Hall (2017) did a qualitative study to explore possible contributing factors to the persistence and graduation rates of undergraduate Black and Hispanic males who were enrolled at a regional four-year public university. In the study most of the young men expressed having experienced microaggressions and stated that they redirected them as motivation to persist in their studies (Hall, 2017). This is not the experience of every Black male at a PWI, as Kim and Hargrove (2013) stated in their literature review journal article. Black men are not all exactly alike (Gordon, 2012) and therefore not all of them experience the environments at PWIs in the same way. Many Black men take advantage of the academic assistance, support services and programs that universities offer and utilize them to strengthen their academic capabilities and thrive in college (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). It is progressively significant to identify strategies that can aid in improving the educational outcomes of Black students (Strayhorn & Terrell 2010).

Many institutions have initiatives that focus on pairing Black males with other Black students on campus or with faculty members of color, to form a mentoring relationship (Clark & Brooms, 2018; Palmer et.al, 2014). These programs provide Black men with a support group and can make Black males feel as though they are included in the campus activities and have a space to speak freely about their experiences. In an article by Brooms and Davis (2017) Black men

expressed feeling as though they did not belong and were being rejected by White peers. Peer groups and student-faculty relationship enhance and support Black males' persistence in college and overall educational experience (Brooms & Davis, 2017).

"Many African Americans in college are first-generation, but others come from middle-class, two-parent families that can offer their children effective educational support" (Sledge, 2012 p. 20). Black males navigate the college-going process just as their peers do, but many of them are first-generation and therefore have the added pressure of being the first to attend college from their family (Hilton & Bonner, 2017). With many of the inner city Black males being first-generation students, the road to graduation can be unfamiliar territory; therefore it is integral for one to have adequate advising, know the policies and procedures of the institution, and to be aware of the support services available in order to achieve (Hilton, Wood, & Lewis, 2012).

First-Generation Students

The U.S Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics defines a First-generation college student as a person who has neither parent having received a bachelor's degree (NCES 2017). According to Ramsey and Peale (2010), first-generation college students account for roughly 30% of the incoming freshmen class in the United States each year. First-generation students are able to make a generational accomplishment in attending college but are also faced with the struggles associated with being the first to navigate college (Banks-Santilli, 2014).

The term first-generation student was originally defined by Fuji Adachi in 1979 to refer to students who do not have at least one parent with a bachelor's degree (as cited by Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) wrote that American higher education and the

American public in general are fascinated with the first-generation population of students and are

therefore doing a great deal of research on them. "The difficulty, however, of understanding and

subsequently addressing the various, and persistent, configurations of inequality associated with

FGSs lies with the complicated, yet obscure state of the FGS term itself, a term used

superfluously and without question" (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018, p.147). Mitchell (1997) stated

that first-generation students entering into post-secondary education institutions are a force that

are significantly increasing.

There are many varying definitions of what a first-generation student is (Banks-Santilli,

2014; Checkoway, 2018; Tate et al., 2015). A first-generation college student is one who is the

first in their family to pursue an education at the postsecondary level (Tate et al., 2015).

Checkoway (2018) described a first-generation student as the first in their immediate family to

attend college. The most widely used definition has been someone whose parents have not

completed a college degree (Davis, 2010; Engle, 2007; Longwell-Grice, Adsitt, Mullins, Serrata,

2016).

As a first-generation student entering college, there are obstacles that will affect their

success (Jehangir, 2010). First-generation students are at a disadvantage when it comes to

familial support, financial assistance, knowledge about higher education, academic preparedness,

and expectations of their educational experience (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini,

2004). First-generation students also have the typical challenges that a continuing-generation

student would be faced with, including adjusting to the college environment, living somewhere

different, and the anxieties associated with which classes to select and which career to choose

(Terenzini, et al.1995). "A student can only start for the first time, once, and if the start is

horrifying, it can easily affect the entire experience" (Checkoway, 2018, p. 72). All of these

challenges may influence how a first-generation undergraduate student adapts and their success in college (Jenkins, et al., 2013)

       Familial Support. The transition to college can be difficult for those that are first generation students due to the fact that their parent(s) are often unable to help them navigate the college environment (Davis, 2010). Engle (2007) in an article stated that parents of first-generation college students are less likely to help their children when it comes to preparing for college entrance exams, accompany them on college tours, seek information regarding financial aid or attend information sessions. A study done by (Sy, et al., 2011) on 339 first-time freshmen women compared first-generation and continuing generation females based on their stress levels, level of their parents' emotional and informational support, and the relationship between both types of support and the females' stress during their college transition. The study showed that when compared to continuing-generation students, the first-generation students had lower levels of emotional and informational support from their parents (Sy et al., 2011). The lower levels of support and encouragement from their parents are due to a number of factors. In a research journal by Sledge (2012), she gives insight that families who are supportive and reliable before students start college should maintain that close connection with them throughout their time. If they have that sense of comfort with their family, then they would be more confident when it comes to building relationship with others (Sledge, 2012). Sledge (2012) states that parents and extended family have a vital role when it comes to a students' psychological thoughts on remaining in college.

       Students who come from backgrounds that place a higher value on family interdependence may have expectations placed on them to fulfill familial obligations, which may conflict with college responsibilities (Tseng, 2004). These obligations can leave students feeling

guilty for prioritizing their academics above familial responsibilities. London (1989) describes

this guilt or feeling of shame as being "breakaway guilt," in which first-generation students feel

as though they are at risk for betraying their families. First-generation students are breaking

family tradition, as opposed to continuing it, when they decide to be the first in their family to

attend college. Therefore, family members may become critical of the student's decisions as they

see them as changing or separating from the family and not taking care of their family

responsibilities (Engle, 2007). Engle (2007) stated that some first-generation college students

reported that family members have discouraged them from attending college. First-generation

students may get mixed messages from friends and family when it comes to their college

attendance, due to others feeling ambivalent about the student's social class mobility (Garriott &

Nisle, 2018). Some first-generation students may have "intense feelings of isolation,

estrangement, confusion, guilt, and anguish", caused by the pressures and conflicts from the

relationships with family and friends (Engle, 2007, p. 36).

Financial assistance. Parents of first-generation students lack personal experience with

postsecondary education, consequently they may also lack information about the cost of college,

financial aid, and the college-going process itself; which may lead to first-generation students

being discouraged about pursuing postsecondary education (Engle, 2007). "College knowledge is

particularly low among economically disadvantaged minority parents" (Engle, 2007, p. 31).

Billson and Terry (1982) did a study where they surveyed students who were currently enrolled

and labeled as "persisters", and students who had left prior to graduation. They had a total of 701

students; which is about 55% of the population of students. The interviews that they had with the

"persisters'' provided information to help explain the familial impacts on student's educational

experience. found that family income had a high correlation with occupation, which is largely

determined by education.

Many first-generation students come from low-income backgrounds; therefore, college attendance can be affected by inadequate financial aid and/or lack of knowledge about gaining financial aid (Engle, 2007). "Delayed enrollment, initial enrollment in the two-year sector, part-time and discontinuous enrollment while working full-time, and living off-campus all reduce the likelihood that first-generation students will persist in college" (Engle, 2007, p. 39). Coming from a low-income family may indicate that first-generation students have to divide their time between working and going to college (Petty, 2014).

Some first-generation students have to work because of their obligations to their other responsibilities that they may have outside of college. Thus, they may spend more time working than they do studying, unlike their continuing-generation counterparts (Mitchell, 1997; Terenzini et al., 1995). "Unmet financial need increases the work burden on students, which may limit their academic and social integration on campus as well as their persistence to degree" (Engle, 2007, p. 35). Working restricts the chances that first-generation college students have to become engaged in various campus activities and the number of opportunities that they to develop a sense of belonging within their campus environment (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Social Support. Sledge (2012) defined social support as feedback that validates students and that it can come in many different forms such as: family, friends, sports teams, and student organizations. "Many students have needs to be *social and belong*." (Petty, 2014, p. 260). These needs go unfilled when the first-generation students have family members that are unsupportive and possibly stand in the way of them achieving their goals, and it can lead to a lack of self-esteem (Petty, 2014). Having a social support system plays an important role in persistence, especially in first-generation, low-income, and part-time students. Tinto (2017) stated that this

population of students tend to have a greater challenge with college because of outside responsibilities such as a job or family. When it comes to motivating and retaining first-generation students in college, the social component and the need to belong are vital, as well as when it relates to them succeeding.

The sole purpose of college is indeed to be prepared academically for the workforce, but the social component is just as important, and students will not enjoy their collegiate experience if they feel socially isolated (Martin, 2009). First-generation students are less likely to socialize outside of the classroom, whether that be with faculty or students (Engle, 2007). Also, they are less likely to develop close friendships and participate in academic or social clubs offered at the institution (Engle, 2007).

The lower levels of social integration amongst this group is due to their demographic and enrollment characteristics or the type of institution in which they choose to attend (Engle, 2007). As previously mentioned, first-generation students usually are from low-income families and have to work, which means they are not often on campus and they usually have to schedule classes around their work schedule. This leaves little time for them to just be a student on a continuous daily basis (Engle, 2007).

Academic Preparedness. With the increase of diversity in student populations, it is important that institutions have an understanding of students' academic preparedness in order to better serve them (Atherton, 2014). In a study done by Warbuton, Burgarin, Nunez & Carroll (2001) where they examined the high school preparation and college persistence of first-generation students, they found that there was a relationship between parents' education level and how likely it would be for their student to have a more rigorous high school curriculum, and then later enroll and perform well at a 4-year institution. They found that first-generation status

was negatively associated with not only the students' academic preparation, but persistence as well. It was found that first-generation students, when compared to their continuing generation counterparts, were less likely to have taken a calculus course in high school (Warburton et al., 2001).

The rigorousness of the students' high school curriculum had a strong association with their college GPA, the number of remedial classes they had to take, and the rate at which they persisted and also attainment rates (Warburton et al., 2001). Of the first-generation students who took rigorous high school courses, 95 percent reported that they did not take remedial courses during their first year, compared to 96 percent of continuing generation students. This exemplifies that first-generation students who have rigorous coursework are on par with their continuing generation peers.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The framework for this study draws from the concept that to be motivated students must have certain needs met, and a level of campus or community involvement. Involvement itself being something that requires physical and physiological energy. It is a challenging transition into the colligate or university environment for many first-time students (Ishitani, 2016). Coupled with being new to an environment, and not having parents who can explain the experience, first-generation students are at a disadvantage. Being at an institution serves as an opportunity to discover one's self. First-generation Black males are going into their institutions with expectations set on them from society, their families and themselves. These environments are not always well equipped with programs that are inclusive of their needs. Jordan (2018) stated that educational institutions have become sites of exclusion for Black males. First-generation Black males in undergraduate institutions are navigating and developing as they seek

who they are and where they belong.

Maslow's (1943) Theory of Human Motivation theorizes that humans are motivated to achieve various needs, but there are some needs that take precedence over others and they have to be satisfied first. It is important to take a holistic approach of viewing the first-generation Black male. Excellence is a holistic process that not only includes cognitive ability and racial self-acknowledgment, but also takes into account how Black males choose to use resources at their institution for bettering African Americans both locally and globally (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory focuses on the behavioral aspect of student development and the processes that facilitate that development in students. It acknowledges that students' time is a finite resource and that educators are competing for that time and energy.

A Theory of Human Motivation. Maslow's (1943) Theory of Human Motivation focuses on the five basic hierarchical human needs. The needs arrange themselves in this hierarchal order based on the predominance. These needs are physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. None of these are isolated, but rather related to how satisfied or dissatisfied other needs are. Maslow also refers to man as a perpetually wanting animal. Additionally, this theory states that we are motivated by the desire to reach to a place where we can maintain the various conditions that would allow us to be satisfied with these needs, and other intellectual desires as well (Maslow, 1943).

The first set of needs are physiological needs such as: air, water, food, shelter, clothing, rest, and reproduction. (Maslow, 1943) This is the most basic set of needs that need to be met. We need to physically be able to survive. For college students this means having a place to live on or off campus, access to food, and the ability to take care of themselves. Physiological needs are the most pre-potent of them all (Maslow, 1943). This means that if a human was missing or

lacking everything in life, these needs would be the first that they would more strongly require or yearn for (Maslow, 1943). For a Black male, this means ensuring that his needs such as a place to sleep and having food to eat are met. Maslow (1943) states that a man who is dangerously hungry would have no interest except getting food. Food would become the only thing consuming his thoughts.

The United States Accountability Office (2018) reviewed 31 studies regarding college students and food insecurity. They found that with a college education being more accessible to low-income persons, that there are many low-income college students who are struggling to meet their basic needs. If a Black male is from a low-income home, it is a possibility that he can be faced with the challenge of being food insecure.

Once the physiological needs are satisfied, 'higher' needs emerge (Maslow, 1943). The second basic set of needs are the safety needs. This is simply having safety and security; having freedom from fear. Typically, the average healthy and fortunate adult in our culture is satisfied with their safety needs because in a good society, members feel safe from wild animals, criminals, etc. However, this does not stand true for persons who are neurotic, near-neurotic, or from low economic and social status (Maslow, 1943).

If a Black male is coming from a low economic or social status, then it will be harder for him to feel secure if he is used to being in an environment that is less than safe. Additionally, with the current social climate of police brutality, it may be hard to feel safe and secure. It is hard to feel safe in a society where you are being oppressed. These feelings may be increasingly worse for Black males that attend PWIs.

When both the physiological and safety needs are met, the need for love, affection and belongingness emerge (Maslow, 1943). At this point, a person will feel the absence of friends or

a lover, or children. The person will then hunger for affectionate relations with others and will

strive to achieve this goal of belonging (Maslow, 1943). While wanting to attain this goal(s), the

person may very well forget that when they were hungry, they scoffed at love (Maslow, 1943). If

all needs are met, then this is where the student will look for affection and companionship.

Strayhorn (2017) did a study on the factors that influence the persistence and success of Black

men in urban public universities. Through in-depth interviews, he found that for Black males,

when they formed close relationships with same-race peers at PWIs they had a sense of social

connection and an outlet to make friends; to feel a sense of belonging on campus.

The fourth basic set of needs are esteem needs. Maslow (1943) states that all people in

society (with the exception of a few) have a need or desire for self-respect, self-esteem, and the

esteem for others. Maslow (1943) classified these needs into two categories. The first category is

the desire for strength, achievement, adequacy, confidence, independence and freedom (Maslow,

1943). The second category is the desire for reputation or respect from others, recognition,

attention, and appreciation (Maslow, 1943). Satisfaction of these needs leads to feelings of self-

confidence, strength, worth, and the feeling of being useful in the world. When these needs are

not met, feelings of inferiority and helplessness arise (Maslow, 1943). According to Clark &

Brooms (2018), the success of Black males at PWIs can be attributed to some factors such as

them being able to establish a sense of belonging and having supportive relationships. They are

able to feel confident in themselves and achieve their goals. When there is critical support in

place African American students achieve better and persist longer (Bonner, 2010).

The fifth basic need, self-actualization is where one comes to realize that even if all needs

are met, there may still often be discontents and restlessness if the individual is not doing what

they are fitted for (Maslow, 1943). Maslow (1943) gave the example that a musician must make

music. Essentially, what a person is capable of becoming is what they must become (Maslow, 1943). It is still possible that if the student has all his needs met, that he may still be discontent. Clark & Brooms (2018) noted that

> institutionally based and student-centered programs that speak to the specific needs and development of students (e.g., professional networks and sense of self) and provide them with resources that support building community on campus are important arenas that can increase student self-authorship, development, retention, and persistence. (pg. 400-401).

Astin's Student Involvement Theory. Astin's (1984) Theory focuses on the amount of physical and psychological energy a student puts into their academic experience. The theory is rooted in a longitudinal study of over 200,000 students and more that 80 various student outcomes that focus on the impact that college has on different involvement factors including: social fraternities and sororities, athletic involvement, and place of residence (Astin, 1984). The theory has 5 postulates that explain student involvement. These 5 well-proven factual statements will be used to assist in understanding and explaining the experiences of the first-generation Black males in this study.

According to Astin (1984) the first postulate describes involvement as being the investment of both physical and psychological energy into different objects. The objects can be something as general as the student experience, or something as specific as preparing for a chemistry test (Astin, 1984). For a Black male, this can be something as simple as joining an organization on campus or as specific as studying for a midterm in a specific course.

The second postulate explains that involvement works on a continuum. Different students manifest different degrees of their involvement in objects at different times (Astin, 1984). As a Black male, this can look like being extremely involved in a hall government at one point, but

not being as involved with an intramural team as much during this time. Different things have

one's attention depending on what it is most interesting at that time period. There are also

various things that may be influencing the student's ability to become more engaged on campus;

for example, having to work at a job or taking care of family members.

Postulate three explains that involvement is quantitative and qualitative (Astin, 1984).

The example given by Astin (1984) was that you can quantitively measure how long a student

studies, but you can also qualitatively measure whether that student retained what they studied,

or if they just stared at the books. You can see if a Black male is involved in an organization and

how much time he is dedicating to it. Similarly, you can see if learning and development is

taking place. Unfortunately, with involvement being both quantitative and qualitative, in the

same regard you may not be able to quantify how much is being learned.

The fourth postulate, explains that the amount that students learn and develops personally

from an educational program, is directly connected with the quality and quantity of the student's

involvement in that program (Astin, 1984). If Black males are more involved in particular

programs, then they are more likely to learn skills and develop from being in that program. The

more you give, the more you are able to get out of that experience. Clark & Brooms (2018)

expressed how important it is for student affairs professionals to develop holistic programming

efforts that cater to both the academic and social aspects; which will in turn not only support

Black men's transition and development, but also their integration and achievement. Out of

classroom activities can be powerful in supporting students' learning and collegiate experience

(Clark, & Brooms 2018).

Postulate five states that the measure of how effective an educational policy or practice

is, is directly related to the capacity the policy or practice has to increase student involvement

(Astin, 1984). If Black men aren't getting involved, policy and practices are not effective. It is important for institutions to examine practices and find meaningful ways to engage Black men (Palmer et al., 2014). Black men sometimes are uninterested in getting involved because of the cultural climate surrounding certain activities, as they may feel as though activities or lessons are not for them. For example, they may not find any personal benefits to joining a historically White fraternity as opposed to a historically Black fraternity. Palmer et al., (2014) found that Black Greek Letter fraternities are important to the growth and development of Black male collegians. Goings, and colleauges (2015) stated that to effectively teach Black males, we have to do a better job of incorporating their perspectives and contributions into classroom instruction and curriculum. This can be done by using Black literature, research and other resources (Goings, et al., 2015).

Summary

Throughout the research, Black males are amongst the population of racial minorities with the lowest graduation rates, and this is only compounded with the first-generation status. Many institutions are implementing retention programs, but the graduation rate of this particular group still remains an issue. These programs tend to focus on social support and or mentoring. There seems to be a lack of programs that take a holistic approach for helping to retain Black male college students. Chapter three will include the methods I will be using to conduct my study.

Chapter III

Methodology

The primary purpose of this study was to examine and identify the motivating factors for Black males' persistence toward the completion of their bachelor's degree. This chapter includes a description of the study design, participants, research site, instrument, data collection, treatment of data, and data analysis.

Design of Study

The focus of the study was to gain a better understanding of how Black males persist in their undergraduate programs and choose to remain enrolled in higher education. A basic qualitative study was done by conducting direct interviews with potential participants. The interviews were semi-structured so that the researcher could ask questions, but also have participants provide additional information. Jamshed (2014) stated that qualitative methodology allows a prospective researcher to not only fine-tune pre-conceived notions, but also to have an in-depth perspective of the issues that are being analyzed.

Participants

Participants for this study were Black males between the ages of 18-30 completing their third or fourth year of undergraduate education at their institution. Six Black males were selected to participate in interviews. This population was selected because they have had time to acclimate to the university and are closer to the completion of their degree programs. The researcher utilized snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is also referred to as chain-referral-sampling and it begins with a convenience sample of one initial subject (Etikan, Alkassim & Abubakar, 2016). Linear snowball sampling is when the researcher recruits a single participant and the second nominee then recruits the third person (Etikan, Alkassim & Abubakar, 2016).

The Office of Minority Affairs provided a list of Black males that met the criteria. Once given the list, the students were contacted via email (Appendix A) to participate in the study. Students were then selected based on their response to the email sent out. The email was sent out twice in the span of two weeks. Participants who agreed to be a part of the study were then given a date and time for the interview. At the time of the interview participants completed a consent form (Appendix B) and a demographic questionnaire that was provided (Appendix C). Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher asked the participants if they were able to identify anyone else that would be interested in participating in the study. Participants in this study include:

Jamal: is a 22-year-old first-generation Black male from a large metropolitan city. He is majoring in Studio Art and is in his first year at the current institution. He is a transfer student from another four-year state institution. He transferred after his second year. Jamal's involvement includes his Black Greek letter organization, Black Student Union and a student support service.

Edwin: is a 28-year-old first-generation Black male from a large metropolitan city. He is majoring in Early Childhood Education. He is in his second year at the institution. He is a transfer student from a community college where he completed two years. Edwin's involvement on campus is being a Resident Assistant.

Alex is a 21-year-old first-generation Black male from a large metropolitan city. He is majoring in Political Science. He is in his first year at the institution. He is a transfer student from a community college where he completed two years. Alex's involvement on campus includes his involvement in the Black Student Union, the student support service on campus, a student diversity organization, and Student Senate.

Justin is a 20-year-old first-generation Black male from a mid-sized metropolitan city. He is majoring in Journalism. He is in his third continuous year in college at his current institution. Justin's involvement on campus includes his involvement in the Black Student Union, the mentoring group for minority men, and his involvement in Journalism club.

Andrew is a 23-year-old first-generation Black male from a mid-sized metropolitan city. He is majoring in fashion merchandising. He is in his second and final year at the institution. He is a transfer student from a community college where he completed two years. Andrew's involvement on campus consists of his involvement in Fashion club.

Donovan is a 23-year-old first-generation Black male from a large metropolitan city. He is majoring in pre-med. He is in his Junior third continuous year at the same institution. Donovan's involvement on campus includes his involvement in a Black Greek letter organization, a student support service, and the mentoring group on campus for minority men.

Research Site

The research site in this study was a mid-sized university in a rural Midwestern community. The institution has approximately 7,800 students enrolled as of Fall 2019. Of the student population, sixty-three percent (63%) of students identify as White, seventeen percent (17%) identify as Black/African American, and twenty percent (20%) identify with other minority groups. According to the Office of Minority Affairs, 490 African American males (6%) attended the university in Fall 2019. Seventy-three percent (73%) of students were retained from Fall 2018 to Fall 2019.

Elmir, Schmied, Jackson, & Wilkes (2011) stated that talking about an experience in an environment that is safe and respectful can help participants with gaining personal control over a situation that may be sensitive to speak about. Therefore, interviews were conducted in a safe

space that was agreed upon between the researcher and the participants. The interview site

allowed for privacy to protect the participants. Elwood & Martin (2000) stated that participants

may feel more empowered in their interaction with the researcher if they are given a choice about

where they will be interviewed. The location of the interviews was not a space where they may

be questioned by peers regarding what they are doing.

Instrument

The individual semi-structured interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

Semi-structured interview questions were designed to elicit specific answers from respondents

and were used to obtain information to compare and contrast later (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun,

2015). Semi-structured in-depth interviews is the format that is most widely used for qualitative

research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). As this study is seeking to gain insight into the

specific individual's experiences this method was selected for this study. As opposed to group

interviews, individual in-depth interviews allow for the interviewer to delve deeply into matters

(DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The semi-structured questions that were asked during the interviews can be found in

(Appendix D). Fraenkel et al., (2015) stated that in a qualitative study, the researcher is

considered a key component of the instrument. The research served as the interviewer and was

therefore the instrument. The researcher asked semi-structured questions to gain an in-depth

view of the experiences of the participants in the study.

Data Collection

Data was collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews that were recorded on

two audio devices. Participants were made fully aware before starting the interview process.

Jamshed (2014) stated that recording interviews makes it easier for the researcher to focus on the

content of the interview. The audio recordings were then transcribed and coded for common themes. The data was only accessible by the primary researcher and shared with the co-investigator when necessary.

According to Fraenkel et al., (2015), no matter what kind of interview conducted, and questions prepared; there is no benefit if the interviewer is unable to capture what the person being interviewed actually says. It is required to have some method to record an interviewee's words verbatim (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Data Analysis

Responses to interview questions were reviewed, transcribed, and then coded and analyzed for frequent themes. After the transcription process, the data was coded. Columns were used to separate the excerpts and the descriptive code. This was done for each of the transcribed interviews. According to Saldaña (2013), the number of themes, codes and categories for each project will depend on various contextual factors. Once the coding was completed, the information was then arranged by common themes related to specific research questions.

Treatment of Data

The data from the transcribed one-on-one interviews with the participants were kept in a secure file on a password protected computer that only the primary researcher has access to. During interviews participants were initially assigned a participant number that they were unaware of. The number was then used when coding that participants' information. Additionally, the participants in this study were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. The data will remain in a secure file on a USB drive; which will be locked in a safe and then discarded after three years, in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines.

Summary

   This chapter describes the qualitative approach that was used to conduct the study. The target population is identified and the procedures that were taken to protect their identity is explained. Chapter four will consist of an analysis of the data collected from interviews. This data will be presented with the coded themes.

Chapter IV

Analysis

This chapter contains the analysis of data collected from interviews with six first-generation Black male undergraduates. The purpose of this study was to explore what influenced the persistence of first-generation Black males at a Predominantly White Institution. Two research questions guided this study: What influences Black males to persist at the institution; and what challenges do Black males face in coming to a PWI? These questions will be analyzed below.

Challenges Black Males Face at a PWI

Participants were asked a series of questions regarding the challenges they faced being at a Predominantly White Institution. The questions were about experiences they have had since coming to a PWI, challenges they have experienced, and what would they change about their experience along with many others. Participants talked about a variety of challenges and have been broken down to these themes that will be further addressed below lack of support, mental health, and racism/microaggressions.

Lack of Support. When asked about some of the challenges they were faced with, participants described what they saw as a lack of support for students; not just other Black students but minorities in general. Alex, who is a member of student government and is also involved in several organizations with a predominantly White student presence talked about there being a lack of encouragement for students to take advantage of leadership positions. He talked about his experiences at conferences and leadership events on campus, stating,

Like at the conferences and things I'll never see the black students like accomplishing anything. So, I'm like, it makes me feel like man, why isn't it, is it because they got it [the

award] and aren't present, or is it because the black students and other minorities are like

struggling on campus? I don't ever see any other minorities there. I always ask myself

like why, why isn't that? Are they struggling? Like how do they feel on campus? Because

I feel like if they have the support, they will be more susceptible to doing things like that.

Alex also spoke about there being a lack of overall support and staff to help minority students.

Alex goes on to say, "I feel like these minority students just don't get enough support in general

and like tutoring services and things like that and different mentors for them." Alex discussed his

awareness that other non-White students are not taking advantage of these opportunities and it

may be lack of awareness or lack of desire to put oneself in an environment where they will be a

minority person. Alex talked about how he sees it as a personal mission to try and pave that path

for other students.

Jamal, a third-year studio art major, talked about facing issues and feeling as though he is

alone in his struggles. He said, "I feel like I don't have nobody to talk to about my problems that

I am going through, like some way to for me to put my problems on other people and stuff like

that." When talking about challenges, Justin shared that he sometimes felt like he was alone in

certain situations. He shared,

As far as challenges, just sometimes, you know…I'm not saying I'm not fully motivated,

because I have people that motivate me, but sometimes we kind of, you know, you feel

like you're kind of by yourself sometimes; just certain times.

The participants talked about how from their experiences they see that there is a lack of support

for Black and other minority students.

Mental Health. Participants identified mental health as a challenge when they were

asked to talk about the challenges they have faced. They described why this was a

challenge and identified ways they think things could be improved from their perspective. They talked about the mental health being linked with feelings of isolation. Jamal shared a bit about himself and his personal experience in dealing with his own challenge of mental health,

> Mental health. Uh, I know you didn't really touch on that, but like mental health is like a very, it's, it's, it's very big. I feel like I don't have nobody to talk to about my problems that I am going through, like allow me to put my problems on for other people and stuff like that. So, I just tend to keep it to myself, but like it'd be bothering me, some of my problems might be bothering me, so the fact like I just don't know what to do at some points.

Alex, when asked to talk about his challenges shared some of his experiences in dealing with mental health especially within the Black community,

> I feel like mental health plays a big part in the minority community on campus. And the reason I say that is because it's like I hear a lot of people that were telling me that the counselors have a waitlist

In his interview, Alex touched on the peer mentoring available to Black men on campus and how there should be more of a push for that on campus. It is worth noting that unlike some of the other participants, Alex and Jamal are not a part of the Black male mentoring group on campus. Alex states,

> I feel like if these students had somebody to talk to that's around their age group or something like that, somebody that's knowledgeable of the things that they are going through as a college student, just to help them out. I feel like it should be more of that pushed out on campus to help different students.

Both of these participants discussed how they see themselves and their peers dealing with their mental health as a Black man on the college campus.

Racism/Microaggressions. Participants identified racism and microaggressions, and it appeared when asked to talk about things that are a challenge for them. A couple spoke about the microaggressions they experience in the classroom from both fellow students and instructors. Then, one specifically spoke about an incident within the community outside of the institution.

Edwin, an education major in his third year of college, talked about his experience with racism in the classroom setting, that was led by the instructor who, from his perspective appeared to lack awareness of how this activity would be interpreted. He talked about a recent event and that lead to him sharing,

> A situation that actually happened probably like last week was like, um, for my social constructs, I think it's social constructs, I believe. Um, there was a line in which we were reading some book and it had the N word in it. My teacher who was white decided we were all like reading passages and so I'm like the last person and so then after me it goes back up to the teacher, she'll read it and then it started back around the class. And so then it's a line that has the N word. And then me and all the black students are looking to see if she's going to say it and she says it loud. I mean like if you were in a hallway you could hear it. I mean I was like, why would you think that it was okay to say it? We all can read it and we all see it. You don't have to say it, or you could just be like bleep and then keep going, you know. But she sat there and when I went to say [tell her] I was uncomfortable, she was like, well it's a book and it's not really indicative of how I feel, but I'm like, you still didn't have to say that.

Edwin had another experience with racism and microaggressions in another classroom, talking

about the way in which people in classes viewed him and expected certain behaviors. While

talking to Edwin he discussed that he had another experience where he was the only non-white

student in his class group. Edwin felt as though he was being seen as an aggressor by the rest of

the group, and it was his perception that he was being treated that way because he is Black. He

went on to share,

> If I were to get angry about something, people would immediately back up. So, I'll give
>
> you an instance. I was in class and we were, I don't want to say like me and this guy were
>
> kind of the front runners to be leaders of the group for this project, but we kind of were
>
> and so like I had a way of doing things and he had a way of doing things. I'm like, well
>
> this way is a lot easier and it gets everybody involved. I was going to use a Google drive
>
> to let everybody put their 2 cents in and that way it wasn't just all me or all him, but it
>
> included the whole group. He wanted to just, kind of like write it himself. So, I had
>
> gotten really angry because I wanted to involve everybody and since I got angry him and
>
> like two other, um, white people that were in the group kind of were like, Whoa, you
>
> need to give it to him, and then one person who was like, chill out you don't have to like
>
> start a riot or start a fight. And I'm like, I'm just angry. I wouldn't start a fight with
>
> anybody in class. I don't want to do that; I'm just upset because I think everybody should
>
> be included in this. So that was one instance where I was like, that was just a lot.

Jamal shared specific examples of microaggressions that he experienced in the classrooms. He

talks about an experience he had in class,

> Definitely, definitely microaggressions. In class I sit in front of this, um, white, short hair
>
> militant guy. Um, and I'll sit right behind him. Like he's just constantly always staring at
>
> me, like constantly looking. Like any noise I'll make, he'd just constantly staring at me

and just turning around. One day I'm just going to say, "what are you looking at?" I'm just

that fed up at that point too when it gets to that point. You don't have to constantly keep

looking over your shoulder like I'm going to do something to you. I'm in class learning,

I'm not going to do anything. I'm not going to do anything. I don't pose a threat to

anybody. I'm just trying to get a degree please. And then this is lately, this, um, this girl,

another girl who would just be like rolling her eyes at me every time. I sit across from her

and she'll look at me and roll her eyes or I'll be writing, and I could feel people look at me

for some strange reason. So, I'd look up out the corner of my eye and I see her looking at

me. So, I mean, I don't know what it is with these people, but...

Donovan shared his experiences of being in a classroom for his major. He talks about classmates

underestimating his intelligence and professors having double standards. He shared,

Yeah, I felt like, um, I was stereotyped a lot in my bio department. I felt like they felt like

I was smart, but they didn't know how smart I was. If that makes any sense?! I know it

was plenty of times where I asked a question and I felt like my professor didn't like blow

it off as if it was dumb, but the students around me kind of made it seem like it was a

dumb question, but there were plenty of times where I noticed somebody asks a pretty

obvious question but the professor took it as a sense of them trying to gain clarity, and

when I did it he took it as a sense of me not paying attention like he was. Like I

remember one time he said something like, well let me go back to the last slide since you

obviously didn't read it. I was like...

When asked about challenges at the PWI, Jamal talked about what it was like

experiencing racism and he shared his experiences with moving to the town that the PWI was in.

He shared his overall frustrations with not expecting to experience racism, and not being

prepared, but coming to the realization that it was a real thing. He stated,

> I really see what it is like to be a black man in America now that I'm older. So, this, it
>
> ain't, it ain't easy. It's really not easy. Like being discriminated against for jobs. Like, um,
>
> when I applied to a job here, I heard somebody say while I was getting interviewed "Oh,
>
> I don't know how the community feels if we have him work here." I heard this like while
>
> I was getting an interview. I'm like, I know they did not just say that, but then I'm like,
>
> Oh yeah. So that's one thing that bothered me and I told my mom. I had like an issue with
>
> her because she never really told me what it's going to be like growing up, like being
>
> black and stuff like that. She never really told me like the world was against me and stuff
>
> and that they fear me. was just something else I was dealing with here in college, so I just
>
> kept it to myself.

These participants shared similar issues that they faced with racism/microaggressions at their

PWI. They all shared their experiences by providing scenarios and recollections of the situations

they experienced.

Influencing Factors for Persistence in Higher Education

Participants were asked what or who influenced their decision to remain in college.

Participants came from varying backgrounds and have different career interests. Although they

had varying answers, they were all similar in some regard, and influenced in various ways. The

answers that participants gave for their influences to persist in college included: personal choices

for upward mobility, family, school personnel, and campus involvement.

Upward mobility. As participants talked about factors that influenced their decision to

persist in college, they spoke about wanting to improve their lives and attain upward mobility

through education. Jamal shared that he had to stay in college in order to get a job that he desires.
He shared,

> Like if I go, if I drop out of school right now, I'm not going to get a job. I don't want to
> work like at one of these Walmart stores or something. I'm trying to get some money and
> provide because I can't do nothing else, so I feel like school is the only option for that; to
> get a better job in this society and be equivalent to a white high school diploma.

Edwin shared that he has always been career driven and knows that Staying in college will
provide him with better opportunities. He shared,

> Like I said, I was always driven, career driven and driven to succeed, driven to have
> finances or whatever, you know. I was just like, I got to keep going with this, I can't give
> up. I put all my money into it you know, and I pay my balance at the end of every
> semester. I always had around $1,500 or whatever to pay, so I was like, I'm not just
> paying this for nothing. I'm paying for a footprint because I'm getting a degree to be
> better. I just always saw the end game.

Edwin also shared that he didn't have a lot of money growing up and always knew that he
wanted more for himself. He talked about being bullied because of his socioeconomic status, and
not wanting to be like his parents because he felt as though they didn't chase their dreams. He
shared,

> They [parents] didn't graduate, well, they didn't even attempt to go to school. I want to do
> more than that. I want to live my best life as freely as I can and try to pursue my goals
> and my dreams and things like that.

Alex, a political science major, mentioned wanting to make change on campus and make
an impact for all minorities. When asked if he ever thought about leaving the institution, he

shared, "I feel like if I leave my purpose wasn't served of helping other minorities accomplish the goal of being heard." Donovan, a junior pre-med major, was asked what influenced him to return after his first semester. He shared,

> I have to graduate. That's the only way that I can go to medical school, is if I graduate. After my first semester I realized I can do it. I figured if somebody else can graduate, then why not me.

Participants talked about how education was a way to a better life, and how it was better than the other options they saw available to them.

Family. When participants talked about their influences to stay in college many of them mentioned their family members being key influencers; with that being both present family members and families that they desire to have in the future. Alex identified that his family initially pushed him to attend college, but he then goes on to say that other than his family pushing him, he wants to stay to create a legacy,

> I just want to get my education and make a legacy because in the future when I have kids. I want them to lean back on something and be able to go off from my footsteps and make their own footsteps as well. So, I just want, I just wanted to make a foundation for like our future family. And I just want, I just want to be successful in life.

Jamal shared that his influence also stems from the desires that he has for his future family. He shared,

> I need a better life and I don't want my kids to go through the stuff that I went through. You know, I'm trying to provide for them because like now that when I graduate college, I know all of my kids are going to graduate college and all of their kids are going to

graduate college. It's just going to be a generational effect from my family now that I'm

going to start applying for it. So that's another thing that keeps me going.

Justin described that there was only one time when he briefly thought about leaving, but it was

just an end of the semester as things were dragging on. When he was asked why he persists at the

institution after having these thoughts he stated,

I just want to finish and just feel accomplished and things like that. And um, also of

course my family, they keep supporting me and telling me, you can do it, you can

do this, you do that. Just, um, you know, pray and stay, you know, on the right, track.

These participants talked about their family motivating them, wanting a better life for their

family and about the circumstances that influenced them to obtain an education.

School Personnel. Several participants identified persons from their current institution

that support and influence them to continue on at the university. Justin mentioned some of the

persons in his life that are influential and push him on his journey to complete his degree. Justin

made it clear that family had the greatest influence on him, and then also addressed how various

school personnel encourage him at the university,

Like people I mentioned earlier that are involved on campus and stuff like that, because

they [faculty and administrators] are minorities and they could kind of understand

because they're also African Americans, so it's just like they strive and try to push us to

stay in [school].

Justin went on to talk about how he sees those Black administrators and faculty intentionally

working to support and encourage Black students on the campus. Edwin briefly talked about his

faculty and how they were influential in his decision to persist at the institution, stating, "that's

literally what keeps me around is the fact that like the people, the teachers that are in the teaching

program and the other students that are in the teaching program keep me going." Andrew, a

senior fashion-merchandising major talked in depth about one faculty member and the impact

she had on him,

> My main fashion professor Dr. Winslow, I go talk to her because I'm doing an
>
> independent study. So, I meet her one-on-one and we talk about that class I'm doing that
>
> for. And we end up talking about college in general cause we usually get off topic and
>
> talk about college in general and how's it going and finding internships. And so, she's
>
> actually really helped me with getting out of my comfort zone. Cause like I said, I stay to
>
> myself and I'm like an introvert basically. I talk back and forth with her and she gives me
>
> good feedback on what I'm doing good and what I should be trying to do and just doing
>
> different things. And she's the one that basically made me join the fashion organization. I
>
> didn't have time, but she was like, well at least come to a couple of meetings.

Jamal talked about his mentor and his experience in a student support service on campus. He

said,

> Whenever I need help with like a resume, grad applications, free printing, like I can just
>
> go over there; and even like talk to my mentor about something, well talk to her about
>
> anything. Like she's there for me to talk to her.

These participants all mention persons who have played an important role in their educational

journey in the academic setting. They speak to how school personnel are there to support them.

     Campus Involvement. Participants talked about their involvement on campus and

how it served as an influencing factor. One participant, Edwin, is an RA but is not involved in

anything beyond his position. However, he has received training about various resources on

campus. Similar to Edwin, Andrew is not very involved on campus. While the others are

involved in various student and academically focused organizations. For Andrew and Edwin who are not very involved, they talked about what that involvement may have looked like for them if they made a greater effort to become involved.

Several participants talked about their campus involvement from their unique perspective. Some intentionally sought out opportunities where they would be around people they could identify with, and this included joining a fraternity for Black men, participating in an academic group, and so on. Donovan shared about his experiences in a mentoring group and a fraternity,

> I feel like it impacted me greatly because it, it made me want to come back [to college],
> too because it was just like once I came to mentoring group I liked the fact that it was a
> whole bunch of black males just in one room. They all were just like cool people. And
> being a part of [fraternity], I feel like they kept me grounded, they helped me, um, see
> who I was as a person. It helped develop me into the person that I am. And with that,
> that just kept me pushing and it kept me wanting to do more

Jamal talked about his involvement in the Black Student Union on campus after being asked to explain a bit more about the minority student organization. Jamal said,

> Black student union?! I wanted to do that. I was on the board, I was like, I'll do graphics
> and stuff, like graphic design. I was making the flyers and stuff like that. And, it was just
> an organization where like I feel comfortable being around people of my, um, skin color
> and stuff like that. Like it was like our safe zone, just like we can be unfiltered, talk
> about everything that's going on at these PWIs. It was just like a safe space for us.

For Jamal he was looking to be with others who looked like him and might understand his experience. When Justin was asked to talk about how his involvement impacted him, he shared

about his experiences in a mentoring group for Black men on the campus.

> It has impacted me a lot and I got to meet and connect with people, and just building
>
> relationships, you know, so that way maybe when I leave or whenever I go and have a
>
> job I have people to grasp for them and have them help me out.

Justin talked about his involvement in an academic club, sharing,

> Also I did join radio as of lately, so I'm in radio, that's something that I joined. I really
>
> like it because it's just everybody's around my major, you know, they give me tips on
>
> how to do certain things with as far as production, how to speak on the air, on radio and
>
> stuff like that. So, I feel like that was probably, like out of all the organizations I'd
>
> probably put that at the forefront because it's helping me prepare myself for the
>
> workforce that I'm pursuing.

Similarly, Alex was asked to talk about how his involvement impacted him and he shared about

his experience in a couple of leadership positions in predominately white organizations. In one of

those organizations his position was as a diversity liaison. He spoke about this position and why

he took it,

> I think it impacted my experience a lot because if I didn't put myself out there, I feel like
>
> I wouldn't fulfill my destiny of making change for everything and everybody. So it made
>
> a big impact. Being in these types of positions, it's just, I mean it can sometimes be
>
> overwhelming, but I don't ever think of it as overwhelming. I feel like I'm just doing my
>
> job and it just shows me how many people support me and how many people don't. It's
>
> just showing me like before I got to my career who people really are.

Donovan, who is in a Black Greek Letter organization shared that his involvement in his

fraternity made an impact on his decision to remain in college at his PWI and not move to

another school. Donovan shared,

> I stayed because I'm almost done, and I feel as though I haven't made a big enough of
>
> an impact as far as leadership and for my chapter. If I wouldn't have pledged [fraternity
>
> name] and I wouldn't have come to the [chapter name] I probably would've left
>
> honestly, but I didn't want to leave my chapter behind because I felt like they needed
>
> me.

Two of the participants shared that they are not involved in much on campus. Edwin is an RA and recognizes the benefits of being more involved but shared that he finds it difficult to get involved while being a student holding this position. He is aware of the opportunities to get involved because of his RA position, and therefore he encourages his residents to get involved. He talked about how things would look if he was involved, explaining,

> I mean, if I was in mentoring group, I felt like I'll probably be like, a little bit better
>
> because I would have that support system and that other black men that go through the
>
> same thing that I go through here. So, you know, I think that would've been better for me
>
> to do.

The other participant, Andrew, shared that he doesn't really have time to get involved based on his job that he needs to help assist with his college expenses.

All participants mentioned what they gained, or would have gained from being involved in organizations. Their involvement ranged from fraternities to affinity groups and academic clubs. They identify the importance of finding groups where they will be comfortable and surrounded by people who will support them as well as pushing themselves to grow and learn in different types of organizations and leadership positions.

Summary

The research in this study was conducted to further examine the persistence factors, and the challenges faced by the participants. Chapter four is a summary of the results from six one on-one interviews conducted. Although there were common themes amongst participants, it is important to note that participants had unique experiences. Chapter five will provide a summary of previous chapters

Chapter V

Discussion

This study sought to examine the motivating factors for first-generation Black males' persistence toward the completion of their degree programs and to identify the challenges they face as they accomplish this. In this chapter the results of the study are presented, looking at the analysis and identifying what was found in understanding the challenges that Black males face and what influences their persistence. This chapter is a discussion of the results found, recommendations for practice, and future research that should be conducted on this topic.

Discussion

The research questions guiding this discussion are: what are the challenges Black males face in coming to a Predominantly White Institution; and what influences Black males to persist at the institution. In looking at these two questions participants were given the space to speak freely about the experiences which provided great insights that related to previous research as well as provided some new insights.

Challenges faced by Black males at PWIs

The previous literature done on First-Generation Black males identifies some of the challenges of this population as a lack of support, their first-generation status, issues related to race and feelings of isolation (Palmer et al., 2014; Scott et al., 2013; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). Participants in this study also spoke about their challenges from a very honest perspective. They identified that there are things they experience every day, in the classroom, in student organizations, on campus, and off campus. These challenges were broken down in to two categories racial issues and lack of support. These are further explained below.

Racial Issues. In a 2017 qualitative study, Hall(2017) explored the contributing factors to the persistence and graduation rates of both Black and Hispanic men who were enrolled at a regional four-year public university as undergraduates. Most of the men expressed that they experienced microaggressions, and they specified that they redirected it as motivation. Of all the participants in this study, Donovan was the only one who spoke about using this as motivation to persist. He spoke of his classmates and professors knowing that he was smart, but not knowing how smart he really was and how this motivated his persistence and how he wanted to challenge their perception of him.

Participants in this study expressed several instances of racism and microaggressions. Strayhorn and Terrell (2010) explained that the media and press' use of words that negatively describes Black males leads to negative stereotyping by their White peers and teachers. Jamal and Edwin in particular recalled several instances in both their classrooms and the community where they were stereotyped or had to face microaggressions. Harper (2015) stated that microaggressions are the means through which many of the stereotypes of Black men are bore. The participant in this study, Jamal, shared that he felt as though he wasn't prepared to deal with microaggressions. Being in high school and then coming to university he was faced with a very different set of microaggressions. This is a very real issue that this population is faced with every day on their campus. Microaggressions aid to the feelings of unwelcomeness, as these men are in spaces such as class and their residence halls where they are the minorities.

Lack of Support. Sledge (2012) defined social support as validating responses that students get from family, friends and organizations or sports teams as well. Participants identified feeling as though there was a lack of support for Black students on campus, and at the same time they could not attend or get involved in most of the perceived White organizations.

They also talked about feeling alone and isolated as they saw very few other Black men on the campus. Alex went in depth to discuss what he saw as the lack of encouragement for Black students to get involved, as well as the lack of mentors for them. There are many institutions that focus on starting mentoring relationship by pairing Black males with other students or faculty members of color through different initiatives on their respective campus. (Brooms, 2018; Clark & Brooms, 2018; Palmer et.al, 2014). The institution where this study was conducted has such a group, and some participants were engaged with this group and still felt as if there was more that could be done.

Several of the participants in the mentoring group identified how they currently benefit from having that safe space to connect with other Black males. Unfortunately, there are still many Black men on the campus who are not in this group, and therefore lack that support. Brooms and Davis (2017) wrote an article in which Black men expressed that White peers rejected them, and they felt as though they didn't belong. Having these mentoring groups that target Black male students does make a difference as those participants in this study identified. But then they talked about how few Black male faculty and staff are visible on campus.

Kim and Hargrove (2013) stated that several Black men utilize and take advantage of the support services, programs, and the academic support that universities offer and thrive in college. There are several resources available for students. However, there are many students that are not utilizing the resources. The participants in this study utilized several of the resources available to them. They talked about the persons that work in the spaces that are recognized as resources more than they talked about the resources themselves. For the participants the people are more important as a resource than the service provided, especially if the service was provided by a Black staff or faculty.

Influences to Persist

In regard to persistence factors, participants mentioned Family as a source of support and motivation. Participants also identified their campus involvement as a factor that lead to their persistence. Four major themes were found from both the current research and the literature. These themes are: family, campus involvement, lack of support and racial issues. The themes will be discussed in comparison to the literature review.

Family. Participants in this study identified their families as key players in their motivation to remain enrolled at the institution. For some of the participants it was the fact that they were the first in their family to attend and they knew how important it was to pave that path for future generations. Others identified that attaining a college degree meant that they could better support their family financially. Strayhorn and Terrell (2010) stated that family is a major basis of support for Black students during the length of their educational journey. Participants in this study talked about how the constant support from their family helped them reach their aspirations.

Participants specifically talked about the relationships with their immediate family from parents to siblings and extended family members as well. Sledge (2012) found that family involvement and constant support during a student's higher education journey increased their chances of persistence. Participants discussed having conversations with family members often regarding school, situations they were facing, and so on. These were the conversations they identified as helping them get through challenging experiences. For some of the participants they were first generation students who could not turn to a parent for guidance like some of their peers could, however they still knew they would get support when they needed it.

Campus Involvement. Martin (2009) stated that although the purpose of college is to

academically prepare individuals for the workforce, that the social aspect is equally as important, and to enjoy their collegiate experience students must feel socially included. Participants talked about their involvement on campus in various organizations; some where they sought out organizations where they would intentionally be around other Black students, like joining the Black student union or the mentoring group. Participants specifically discussed how their involvement allowed them to be around others who looked like them, and also provided them with a safe space. Participants also talked about how they joined organizations that did put themselves around peers that did not look like them, like an academic group or the student senate.

Maslow (1943) stated that the needs love, affection, and then lastly belonginess came about once the first basic needs of physiological and safety needs were met. Participants in this study were able to join organizations, because they had their fundamental needs met either living on or off campus. And this campus and community where the study was conducted is a rural community with a very low crime rate and many of the participants came from large metropolitan areas. Thus, participants were able to get involved because they had their physiological and safety needs met and there was a level of safety. The microaggressions and such faced by participants may make participants feel unwelcomed, but not unsafe.

Astin (1984) in his second postulate talked about involvement working on a continuum. With each participant it was seen that at different points involvement changed, where they were once just a member of the organization, then they became a leader. Donovan for example mentioned being involved in hall government in his freshmen year, but now that he is a senior he is in mentoring group and a fraternity and spends most of his time studying for med school because his priorities and interests have evolved over the course of his time in college.

Due to outside responsibilities such as a job or familial responsibilities, first-generation students tend to be faced with more of a challenge than their peers (Tinto, 2017). This was seen in participants Andrew and Edwin, whom both had work responsibilities that prohibited them from being as involved as they would have liked; this was done to have the finances to support themselves. They also expressed making this decision to not have to burden family for money.

Implications for Student Affairs Professionals

Students expressed what they felt were their challenges, and it is important for student affairs professionals to be aware of the challenges this population is facing as they make their way through PWIs. Based on what was learned in this study the following recommendations would help make their experiences better.

Create peer mentoring programs. In one capacity or another, participants identified feeling alone and wanting someone to talk to about their problems. It is important for students to know that they are not the only person facing a particular situation. Black males need to have peers that they can discuss issues as well as build a community and support system of similar individuals while attending a PWI.

Students need a safe space, not just with their peers, but with faculty and staff on the campus who look like them and may run such tutoring programs. However, it often becomes a part of someone's job when it should be a position that for the most part stands alone and is designed to manage peer mentoring programs, groups, and develop further opportunities for this population.

Hire Black Faculty/Staff. Institutions should be intentional with hiring non-White faculty staff and faculty that look like the student populations represented on their campus. Representation is vital in students seeking support and mentorship. Additionally, students long to

have someone that understands their perspectives and can relate to their experiences. This will require institutions to critically analyze their hiring practices and look for opportunities to recruit faculty and staff through resources they are more likely to search through.

It is also in the best interest of the institution to cultivate their own future faculty and staff because they have a unique perspective of the institution and are likely to have a stronger desire to make a difference in this environment and pave the path forward for other students. Students are likely to stay, work and assist the institution in their efforts for diversity if they know that the institution really holds that as a top priority.

Provide current Faculty/Staff with training. Institutions should provide faculty and staff with continuous diversity, equity, and inclusion training. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are things that need to continuously be worked on. Having continuous training allows all faculty and staff members to regularly check their biases and challenge them to develop programs and services that help in providing equity and inclusion on campus. One annual training will not stick with every person, as some people need more continuous ways, and resources to improve themselves.

Students would be more willing to engage with faculty and staff that do not look like them if they felt as though they would be understood and not constantly stereotyped. If faculty and staff were more aware of the identities that students hold and had a better understanding, then they would be better equipped to serve them.

Family Newsletter. Participants identified family as an important influence in them persisting, therefore it is important to keep family members in the loop of things that are happening at the institution so they can better support their student(s). When family members closest to students are aware of what is going on, then they are more prepared to help them.

As first-generation students, this letter may also provide an understanding to the family members which they may not have had unless the students explained it to them. This can serve as an educational tool for the family members. In turn, the family will be able to ask the student the right questions and continue to assist them on their journey; whether that be through emotional support, or financial support.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research on this topic is suggested based on the findings of this study and the current literature. This study was qualitative in nature, and therefore it may not be reflective of the entire population. This study was also limited in that it only included Black males who were from mid-to-large size cities. The current research did not intentionally seek transfer students, but four out of the six participants were transfer students. With this in mind, the suggestions are as follows:

Focus on First-Generation Black females. This study could be expanded to include first-generation Black females and compare their motivating factors and challenges to their Black male counterparts; seeing as though the current literature indicates that they are receiving degrees at higher rates than Black males. The research may indicate some essential reasons as to why there is such a different between the two populations.

This population in general needs as much research done on their experiences as continuing education students. The more research done on this population, then the better we will be able to assist them and provide the necessary resources.

Siblings. Many of the participants shared that their siblings, specifically, were persons that they went to for support and or questions about college. This study could be expanded to identify what impact having a sibling who attended and or completed college has on a First-

Generation students' collegiate journey.

As a First-Generation student, a sibling who may have attended college can be a leading person, but their knowledge may not extend beyond their personal collegiate experience. Therefore, students may still need support beyond their sibling(s). It would be interesting to see how exactly these students are supported by their college-going/ college graduate sibling(s).

Transfer Status. Many participants were transfer students to the institution. It would be interesting to determine what role does a student's transfer status play in their motivation to persist, and how it presents challenges at a four-year institution. Some participants expressed that community college was a great option financially, so it would be worth while researching how many students from this population are attending community college first. It may also be interesting to complete this study on students completing community college and identifying what is motivating them to transfer on and get a bachelor's degree.

Replicate Study. This study should be replicated at other PWIs, and at HBCUs as well, and with other minoritized populations in higher education. It is still important to identify what can be done to increase the graduation rates of this population, and other minoritized populations at all institutions across the country.

Other institutions are still facing issues with this population of students graduating at lower rates. Replicating this study at HBCUs and other PWIs will allow for researchers to see if the factors are consistent with the current literature. Additionally, there may be new findings at one institution that can be used to assist other institutions.

Conclusion

This study was designed to identify the motivating factors of First-Generation Black males and subsequently examine the challenges that they are faced with. The findings reveal that

students identified their family and how they positively impacted their collegiate journey; whether that be aspirations to impress family or to help family attain upward mobility. It was also found that participants feel unsupported by various aspects of the institution. Overall, the findings of this study indicate that family and involvement play a vital role in the collegiate student's journey. Through the shared experiences of the participants it was identified that it is important to create peer support programs and to hire a diverse faculty/staff team that is representative of the student body. It is critical that institutions identify the populations that they serve and create spaces that support their development and success.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Email Communication

Hello!

My name is Shakeitra Simmons and I am a second-year graduate student in the College Student Affairs program at Eastern Illinois University. You have been invited to participate in an interview regarding the factors that influence first-generation Black males' persistence in higher education programs. You have been selected due to your status as a first-generation Black male in your third or fourth year at your institution. The interview will be conducted by myself, Shakeitra Simmons. The information will assist in the completion of my master's thesis as a requirement for graduation from my program.

Participation in the study would require that you take part in an interview that will take approximately 45 mins to 1 hour. If you are interested in participating in this study, please email me at sasimmons@eiu.edu to setup an interview. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. Your involvement in this research will be kept confidential by the researcher. Any personal information you provide will not be connected to you.

I truly would appreciate your participation in my study. If you have any questions about this research, you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Dianne Timm at dtimm@eiu.edu.

My hope is to conduct interviews around the end of October/early November. I look forward to hearing back from you!

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Best,
Shakeitra Simmons
Pronouns: She/Her/Hers
Associate Resident Director of Andrews Hall
University Housing and Dining Services
Eastern Illinois University
Office: 217-581-7688

Appendix B
Consent to Participate in Research

You have been invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Shakeitra

Simmons, a graduate student in the College Student Affairs program at Eastern Illinois

University. You are being asked to participate because you have been identified as a first-

generation Black male in your third or fourth year of undergraduate. Your participation in this

study is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time without any penalty.

The purpose of this study is to examine and identify the factors that motivate first-

generation Black males to persist and complete their degree at a mid-sized PWI. Any responses

you share will not be specifically associated with you. The interview should take approximately

forty-five minutes to an hour and will be recorded on audio. You will not be obligated to answer

any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

After interviewing is completed, the data will be transcribed. This information will only

be accessed by the researcher and faculty advisor Dr. Dianne Timm for analysis purposes. The

data will then be kept on a flash drive for three years, in accordance with IRB, following the

completion of this study. The flash drives will then be destroyed at that point. I appreciate your

participation in this study and thank you for your time. If you have any questions or concerns

about this research, then please contact my faculty advisor Dr. Dianne Timm by email at

dtimm@eiu.edu.

Do you agree to participate in this study and be interviewed?

_____
Printed Name

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Appendix C
Demographic Questionnaire

1. First name?

2. Year in school?

3. Major?

4. Age?

5. Race/Ethnicity?

6. Gender?

7. Are you the first person in your immediate family to attend college? Explain.

8. Full-time/part-time student?

9. Do you work in addition to attending school?

10. Did your parent or legal guardian attend college?

   Yes?

   No?

   Yes, only one

   a. Level of completion?

11. Are you familiar with the term First-Generation college student?

12. What is your GPA?

13. What are you involved in on campus?

14. Have you taken time off from school before starting college or while attending college?

   Please explain.

Appendix D
Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me about you before college?

    a. What kind of student were you in high school?

    b. Describe your family structure for me?

    c. Did you have commitments outside of school (i.e. work, athletics, etc.)?

    d. What sorts of things did you do with your peer group?

        i.   Tell me about your peer group.

2. Tell me about your decision to attend college.

    a. When did you first decide to attend college?

    b. Who influenced your decision?

    c. Was location a big factor?

3. Tell me about how things were when you first started college?

    a. What were those first few weeks like?

    b. Who were your friend groups?

    c. How were your classes those first couple of weeks?

    d. How often were you in touch with people from home?

    e. Where did your support come from?

4. Tell me about your first semester in college?

    a. Who were your friend groups?

    b. How did things go in your classes?

        i.   What was it like to get your first grade back? How did you react?

        ii. Was there a class you struggled in? Tell me about that?

    c. Did your communication with friends and family back home change? Explain.

        i.   Tell me about those conversations.

   d.   Did you join any student organizations that first semester?

5.   What influenced your decision to return after your first semester?

6.   What role does your family play in motivating you?

   a.   How would you describe the support from them?

   b.   How has your relationship with family changed over time?

7.   Are you involved in any organizations on campus? Tell me about these.

   a.   Why did you get involved?

   b.   Tell me about the group and what it looks like – what sorts of things do you do with them?

   c.   In what ways do you think that extracurricular involvement impacted your experience here?

   d.   If not involved, why not?

8.   When you need help or have questions regarding life in college who do you go to?

   a.   Do you have a faculty/staff member that you can go to for support?

   b.   Do you have a mentor(s)? Tell me about that person/those people

        i.   Do they look like you?

        ii.   How did you get connected with them?

        iii.   Describe your relationship

        iv.   Does their race or gender matter?

   c.   How does family help you regarding college?

9.   How would you describe the overall experience at this PWI?

   a.   How would you describe the overall campus climate at this PWI?

    b.   What challenges have you experienced since coming here?

    c.   If I gave you a magic wand and you could change one thing about your experience here at a PWI what would it be?

10. Have you ever thought about leaving the institution? Tell me about that.

    a.   Who did you speak with about this?

    b.   Where did you receive support from in making this decision?

    c.   Ultimately what made you stay?

11. Is there anything that I didn't ask about that you would like to share?